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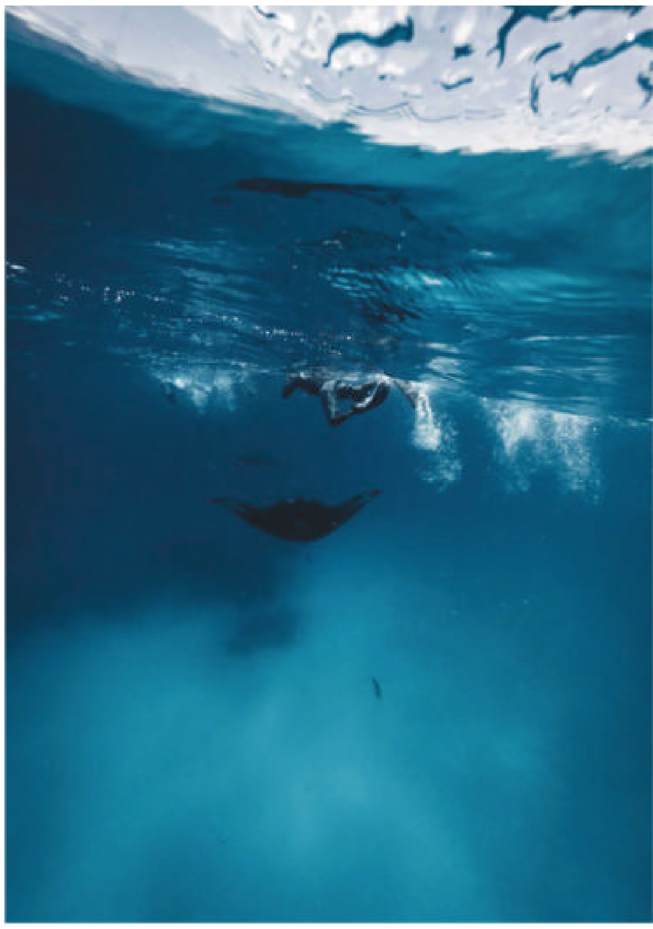

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THIS ISSUE'S COVER
Photographer: **Himanshu Lakhwani**
Location: **Sonamarg, Kashmir**

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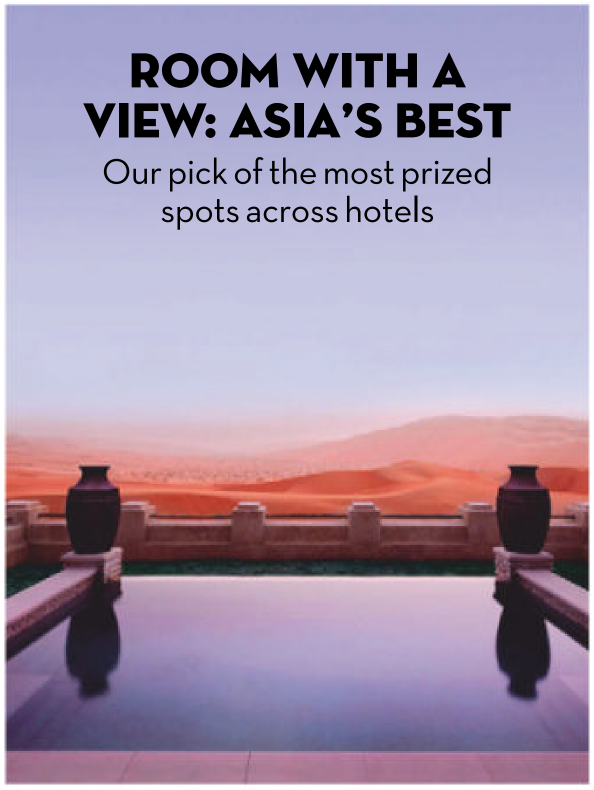

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SHAMILEE VELLU

Writer; *Tea Time in Singapore; p48*

My most memorable meal was in Pakistan during a K2 base camp trek. After a freezing night, our porters baked naan in a makeshift tandoor. Savouring them while watching the sun rise is a moment I'll never forget.

shamvellu

DAVID KAYE

Writer; *What's New in Vietnam; p26*

A "quick lunch" at Côte by Mauro Colagreco (Bangkok), which took four hours, before a much-anticipated dinner at Sorn with its dizzying 20-course Southern Thai tasting menu.

cavestagram

CONTRIBUTORSPEAK

"WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE MEAL IN ASIA?"

NOO SARO-WIWA

Writer; *Voyage of the Mind; p50*

My favourite Asian dish is a Kerala-style beetroot cheera pachadi with rice. I always order it at Rasa, my favourite Indian restaurant in London. I love its texture and tangy sweetness. It's the perfect meal as I have a big sweet tooth and I'm trying to go vegetarian.

noo.saro.wiwa

HIMANSHU LAKHWANI

Photographer; *Keepers of the Vale*; *p68*

I have had one of the best meals at a restaurant named Lost Heaven on the Bund in Shanghai. They serve the best Yunnanese food.

hlakhwani

SAKI KNAFO

Writer; *Green Shoots; p108*

This might not meet the definition, but I love going to Tashkent Supermarket, a chain of Uzbek stores in Brooklyn. Their steam tables are heaped with salads, kebabs, and more. If I had to choose one meal, it might be their chicken plov.

sakiknafo

HARRIET COMPSTON

Writer; *The Best Villas in Sri Lanka; p118*

Egg hoppers. I love the balance of flavours—the sweet coconut sambal contrasted by the lightly fermented rice. The best I've had is at Claughton House (Sri Lanka). The stunning sea view made it even better.

harrietcompston

> "Fantastic service isn't always as visible. Sometimes it's about intuition, thoughtfulness, and attention to detail"

Some years ago, I was co-hosting a party at what was then the beautiful Sujan Rajmahal Palace in Jaipur. It was a night of gifts—a bottle of rose water left by my bed, pillowcases, and a bathrobe embroidered with my name—and beauty. The grounds were lit with thousands of flickering diyas as guests swarmed under shamianas.

Each of the 13 suites in the hotel came with a butler and mine was lovely Pallavi. It was a cold winter's night in Rajasthan, so Pallavi suggested a whisky to warm me up and she returned with a trolley, a bottle, an ice bucket, and crystal glasses. For the rest of the night, she stood steadfastly by my side, serving whisky and ice to whoever I spoke to. Essentially, I came with bottle service, which was entirely unnecessary but also very lovable.

Fantastic service isn't always as visible. Sometimes it's about intuition, thoughtfulness, and attention to detail. It's when housekeeping neatly clips your cords and wires; or your latte is brought without asking; or, as at La Mamounia in Marrakech, a pot of spicy harissa arrives with my every meal. When I asked the concierge there to arrange three kilos of walnut-stuffed Moroccan dates, they couldn't source them but had their chefs stuff dates with walnuts for me. I was on a work trip at The Peninsula in Hong Kong when my uncle was taken ill in hospital. The hotel arranged for a car to take me to him between my meetings without my asking. When hoteliers ask me what it takes to make our annual Gold List, the prestigious line-up of our favourite hotels around the world, I say it's a mix of the tangible and intangible. Our Gold List hotels are not just places to sleep, they imbibe their location's soul. And, in a year in which the industry is struggling to meet demand, and there's an overwhelming shortage of staff, it's also about great—characterful, compassionate—service. It's what forms our attachment and keeps us coming back. I don't know where the monogrammed pillowcases from that night ended up, but I will never forget being the most popular girl at the party, thanks to enterprising Pallavi.

Diviathani

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PHOTOGRAPH: HIMANSHU LAKHWANI

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TRUTH IN TRAVEL

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Q&A In conversation with

SHEHAN KARUNATILAKA

The Booker-winning author chats with **Diya Kohli** about the living, the dead and the otherworldly landscape of Colombo. Illustration by **Jishnu Bandyopadhyay**

Figuring out plug points across hotel rooms has been a challenge for Shehan Karunatilaka ever since he started travelling for literature festivals around the world—an aftermath of winning the 2022 Booker Prize for *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*. Minor niggles apart, this is a long-awaited celebratory moment for Sri Lanka after a year of political and economic crises. The book follows the ghost of war photographer Maali Almeida as he navigates the human and spirit realms to solve his own murder. While Karunatilaka's novel is set in a world of war and violence, there is enough dark humour, nihilistic wit, idealism and tender moments that keep both humans and ghosts going. Rather than sticking to a conventional satire or horror format, Karunatilaka renders the genres anew with an original South Asian take on life, society, politics and...ghosts. *CNT* caught up with the writer at the Kolkata Literary Meet 2023. Edited excerpts from the interview:

What made you use the ghost story as a metaphor to talk about Sri Lanka?

Ghost stories have existed in every culture through time and I thought this was a tried-and-tested form to work with. Also, Sri Lanka has ghost stories wherever there is a tragedy. Tsunami-ravaged villages have reported apparitions coming out of the sea; people see spirits wherever young men and women have disappeared due to massacres. So, either ghosts could be wandering around or it is a psychological phenomenon. And I thought that the form of the ghost story could be put to good use to explore this idea and the peculiar story I had in mind.

"For research, I visited several 'haunted' houses like the old bungalows in Nuwara Eliya"

Was it easier to have ghosts talk politics?

I think the central premise in this book is to have people and ghosts arguing and bickering about what actually happened in Sri Lanka—whose fault it was, what happened and who should pay. This bickering continues till date. Earlier, at the end of the war, it was even more serious with so many civilians dead and no real reckoning. Even questioning the crimes committed on the battlefield was considered unpatriotic. In fact, the idea that led to the book was 'what if the dead could speak?' The idea of Maali Almeida's ghost interviewing victims of unsolved murders was way more delicious a concept than letting humans do the same.

What kind of paranormal research did it take to create this world of the dead?

My research involved visiting a number of 'haunted' houses like the colonial-era plantation bungalows in Nuwara Eliya. I stayed a few nights in these places and while they were creepy with their old Gothic architecture, I didn't see anything otherworldly. It was useful only to get the atmosphere right. I also visited clairvoyants and soothsayers around Colombo and I spent time observing them. In the end, I didn't really get much from either and had to construct the rest of the world by myself.

So, what led to the making of this unique ghostly bureaucracy?

Since I was world-building, I decided to create rules like the idea of ghosts travelling by wind whenever their names are spoken. For most part, the afterlife is just a confusion of spirits hanging on every tree and human shoulder, not knowing what to do. We are told that you wake up in the afterlife to light and a god who speaks to you. But it just appealed to my idea of the absurd that you wake up to a bureaucracy, form-filling and a god who has been away at lunch for millennia.

How do real Colombo landmarks correspond to their unreal counterparts?

Today, Beira Lake is very pretty and they have boating but I remember back in the 1980s, the lake stank and we used to joke that maybe they dumped bodies in there. It was this memory that made me convert it into a place for dumping dead bodies in my book. There are other places which are much closer to real sites. Hotel Leo, for example, is based on the iconic Rio Cinema which was burnt down during the war and has now been restored as an art and perfomance space.

How has Colombo changed since the '80s?

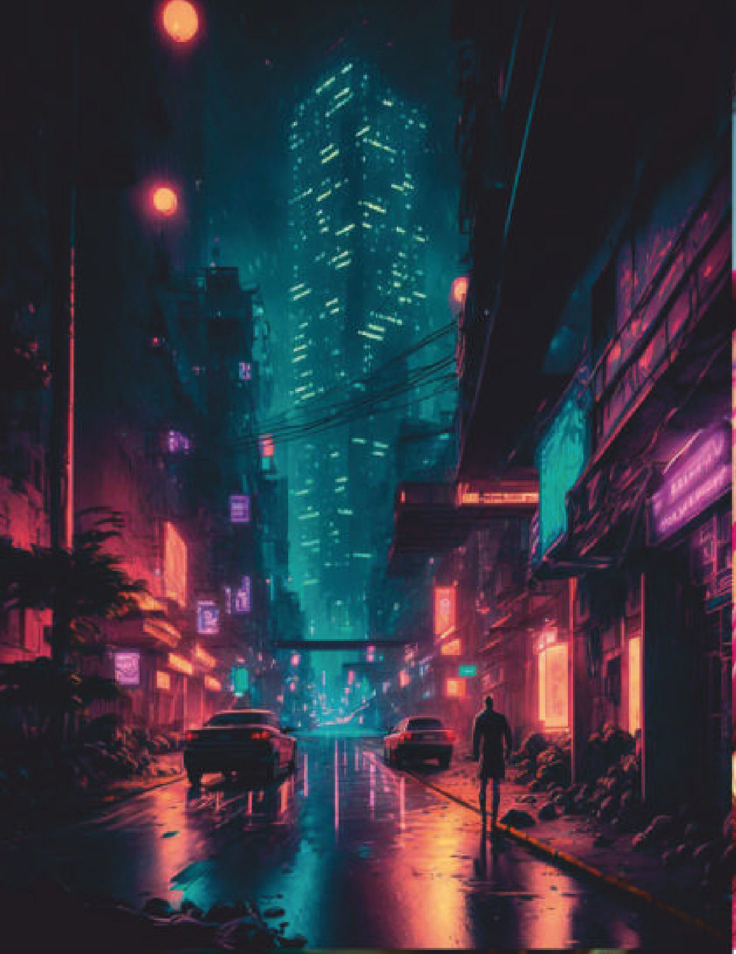
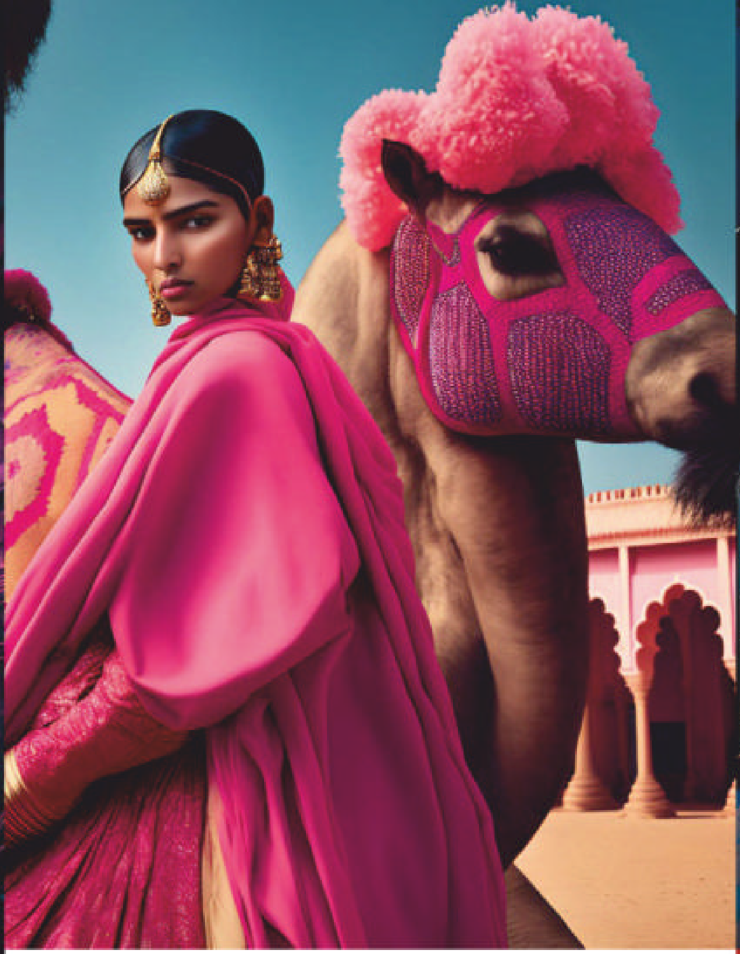
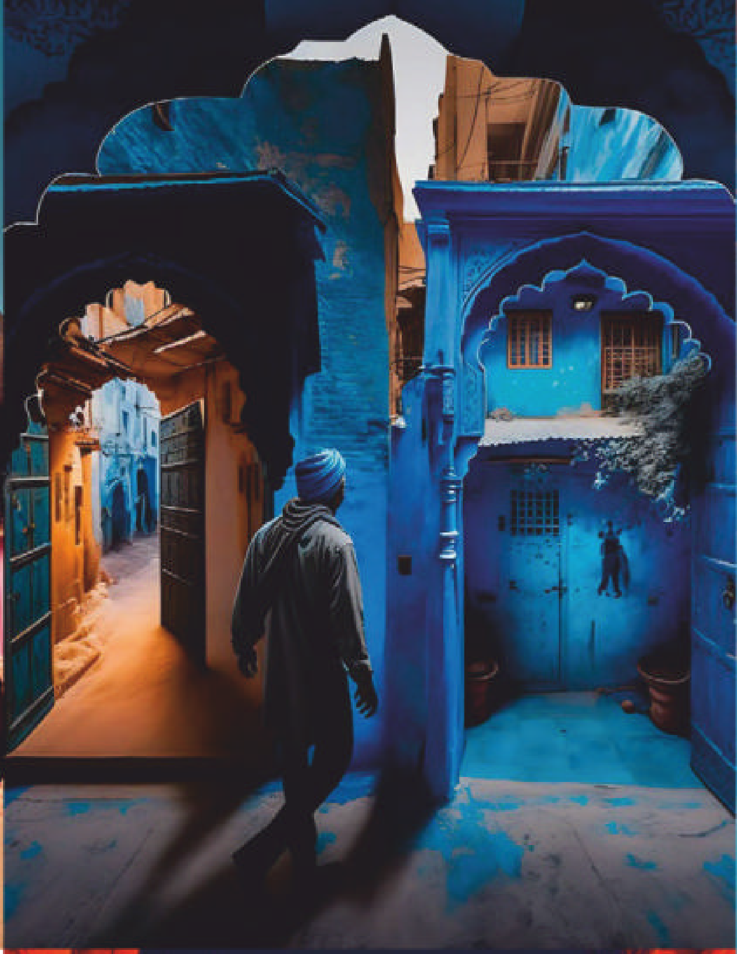
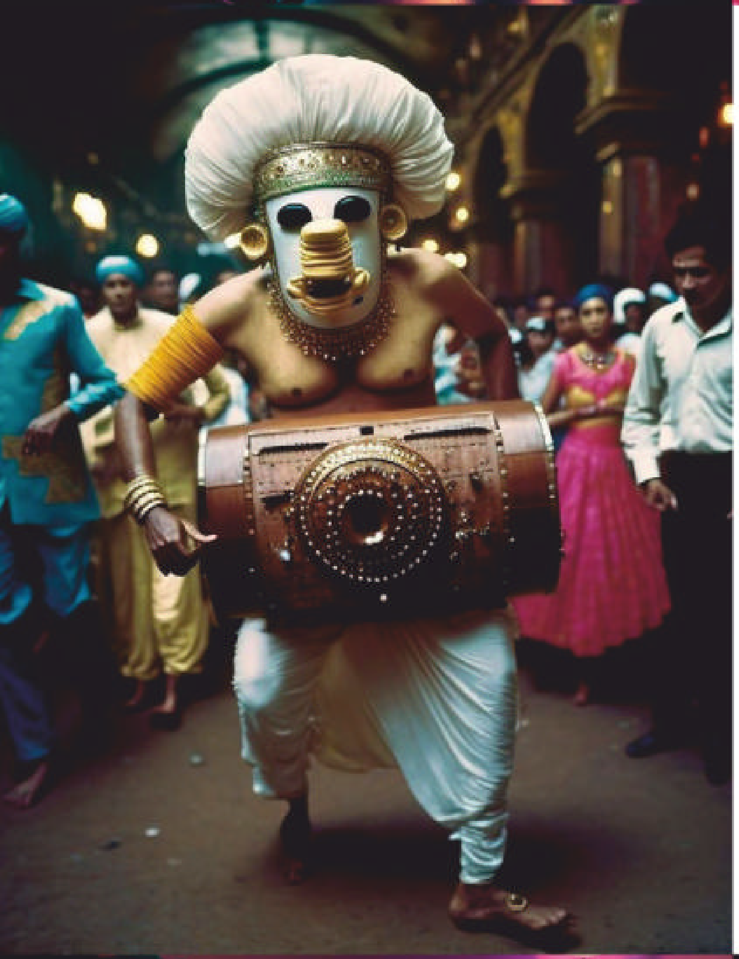
Back then it was a city of checkpoints. After 2009, those disappeared and the military was deployed to build world-class parks. We have a skyline now and structures like the Lotus Tower. Earlier, I would tell visitors to skip Colombo, but now I say stay, walk around and explore its parks and restaurants.

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

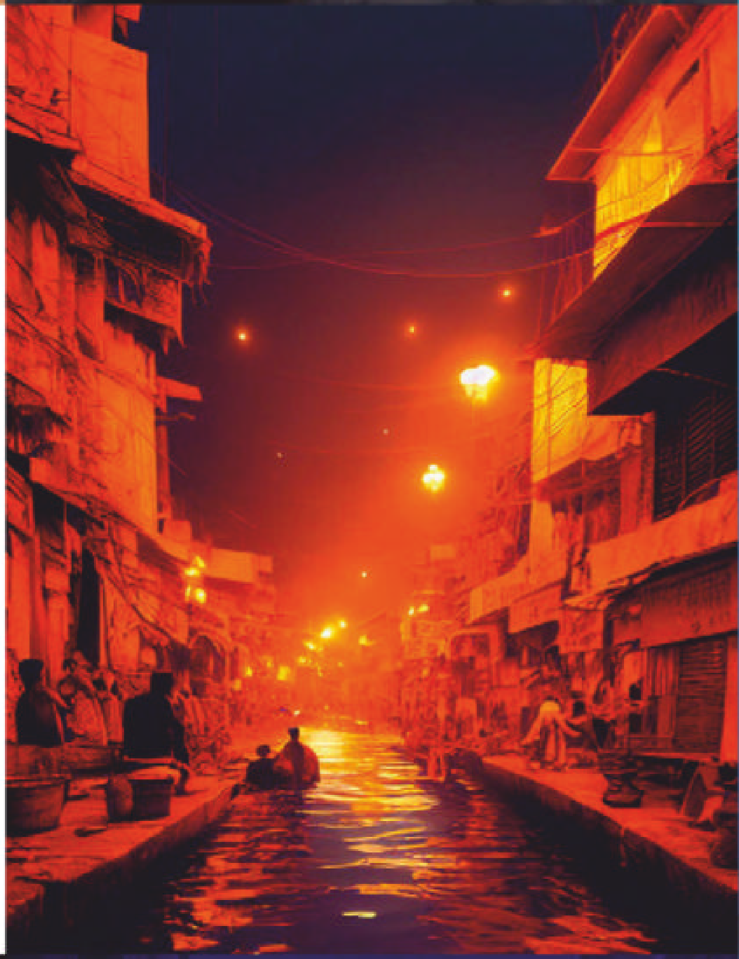
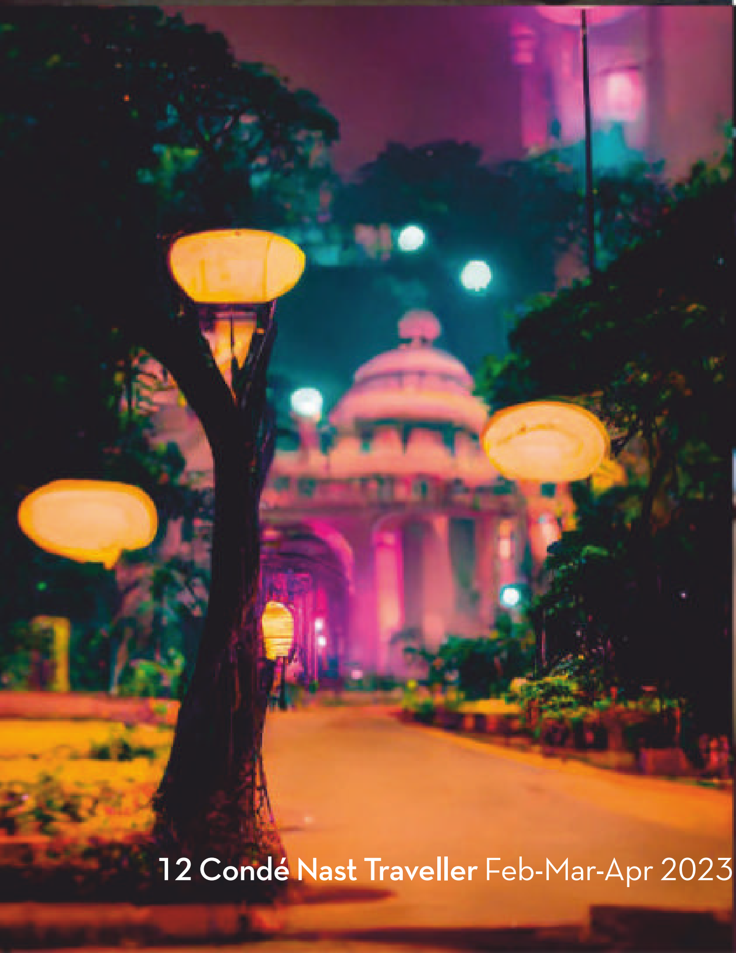
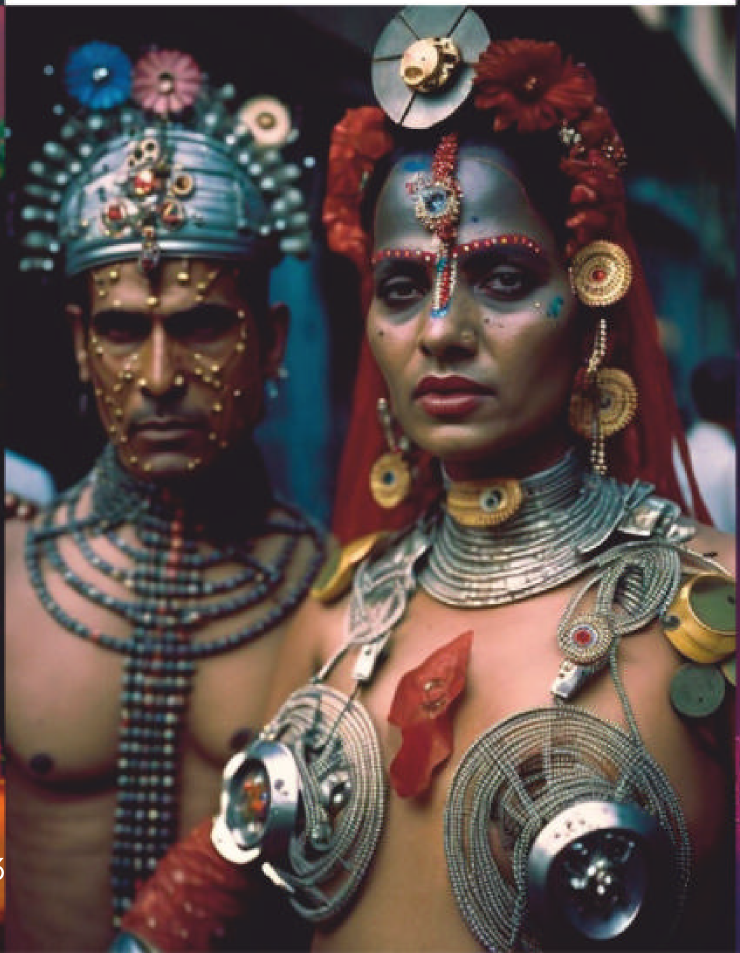
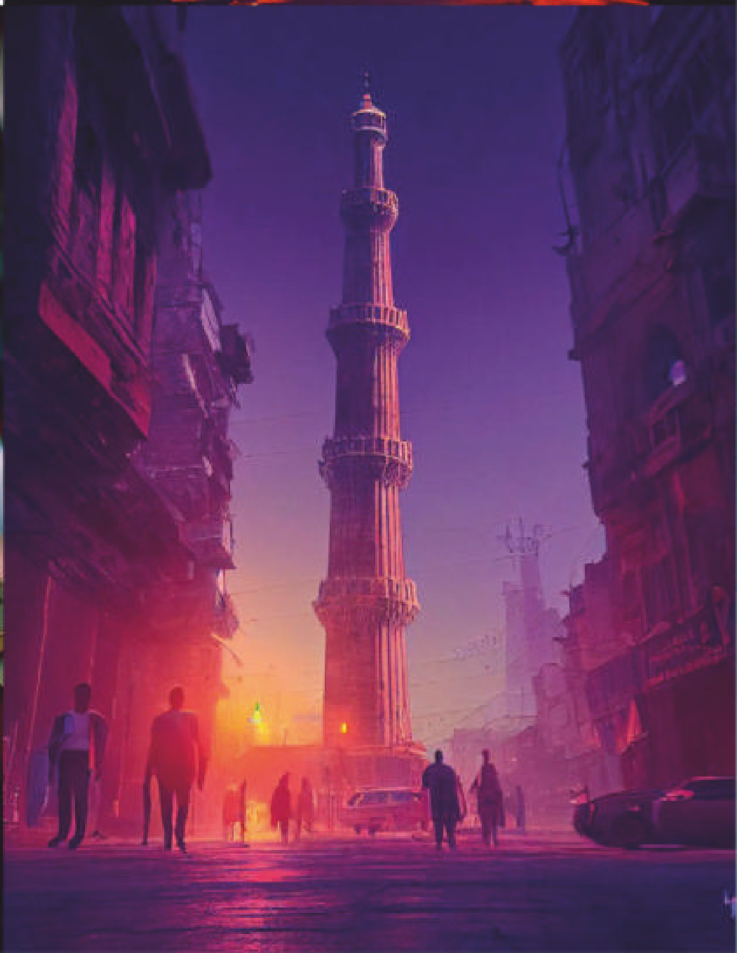
VOGUE INDIA

PHOTO: SIGNE VILSTRUP/*VOGUE* INDIA

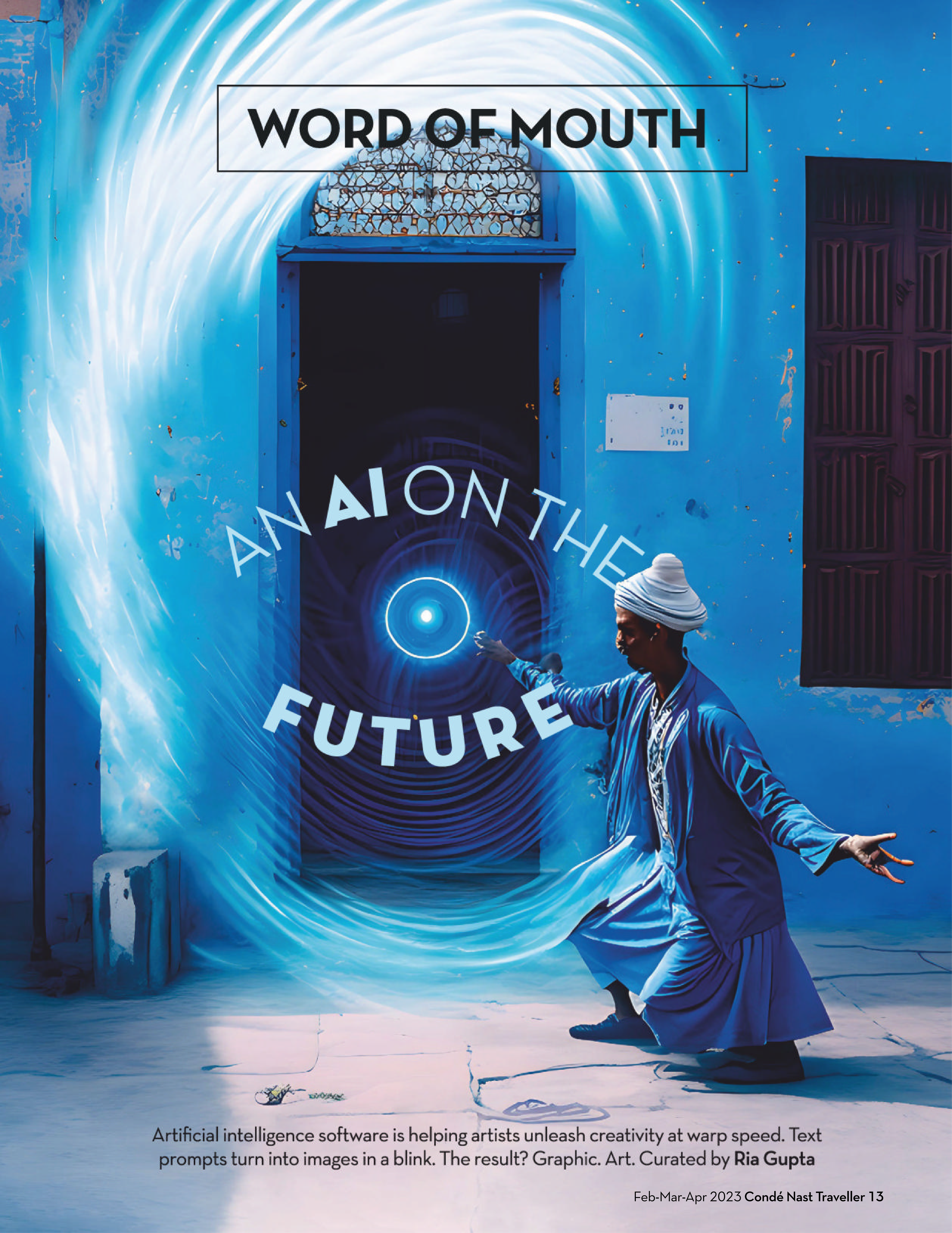
BEFORE IT'S IN FASHION,
IT'S IN VOGUE!

Opposite page: **the bylanes of Jodhpur's Brahmapuri embrace the future in Tapan Aslot's visualisation.** Clockwise, from top left: **Saicharan Shetty's futuristic take on Mumbai; Aslot conjures up an image of a Jaipur royal in traditional Rajasthani attire; Aslot's vision of a time-travelling inhabitant in a retrofuturistic Brahmapuri; Shetty renders Varanasi as a cyberpunk dystopia in neon tones and silhouettes; Shetty's idea of Delhi's Qutub Minar in a world similar to that of *Blade Runner 2049;* in his *Cyborgbay* series, Varun Gupta envisions Mumbai as a city where humans, cyborgs, and robots coexist; Bengaluru's Lalbagh Botanical Garden dons a cyberpunk hue in Shetty's imagination; celebrations and folk traditions in Gupta's 'Cyborgbay' Mumbai**

WORD OF MOUTH



AN AI ON THE FUTURE

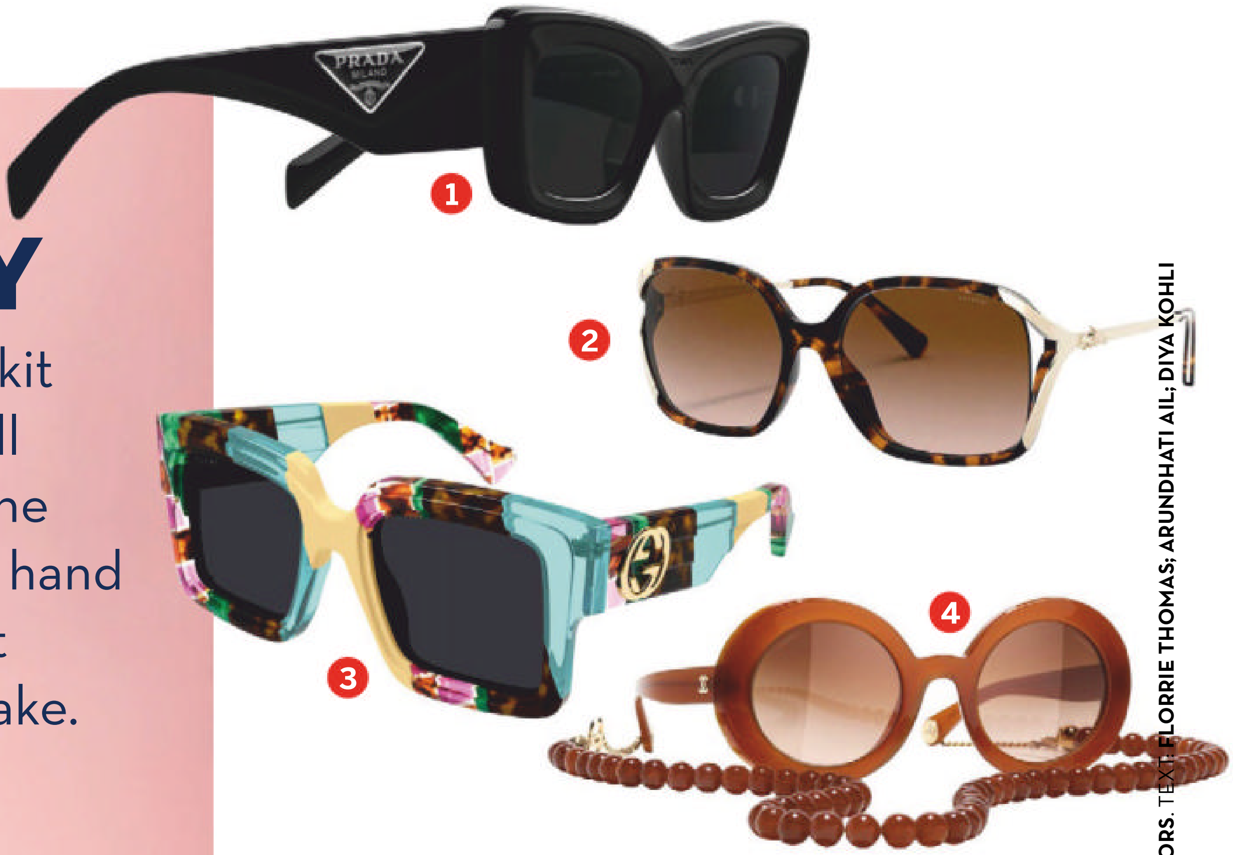
Artificial intelligence software is helping artists unleash creativity at warp speed. Text prompts turn into images in a blink. The result? Graphic. Art. Curated by **Ria Gupta**

SPARKLING SUCCESS

"It's not a bag, it's a Baguette," declared Carrie Bradshaw in that immortal scene from popular American TV series *Sex and the City*. That was the moment when this Fendi model infiltrated popular culture and solidified its status as a Y2K "it bag". More than two decades later, it is still one of the most desired and recognisable pieces in the handbag hall of fame. Although the Fendi Baguette was originally named for the cool, Gallic way it was worn—under the arm like a French loaf—the brand chose to honour 25 years of its existence by holding a show not in Paris, but in New York where its reputation was cemented. Big Apple institutions, including Marc Jacobs, Tiffany & Co. and Sarah Jessica Parker herself, created interpretations of the bag, and Fendi produced 25 re-editions. The show thoroughly celebrated its iconic design, with iterations sewn into beanies, worn on ankle straps and as necklaces, key chains, leg warmers and socks. No matter how it appears, c'est toujours chic. *fendi.com*

FLYING BEAUTY

Vistara's Prints of India amenity kit designed by RAS Luxury Oils will take care of your skin needs in the skies. The organic lip butter and hand cream come in a sustainable ikat canvas bag that is a great keepsake.



sunny style

1 Prada Symbole; 2 Coach Oversized Horse and Carriage Sunglasses; 3 Gucci Havana Recycled Acetate; 4 Spring 2023 Collection sunglasses, Chanel

PHOTOGRAPH: ELLEN FEDORS. TEXT: LORRIE THOMAS; ARUNDHATI AIL; DIYA KOHLI

IN GOOD SPIRITS

Bangkok's nightlife has come roaring back, this time along the Chao Phraya River. By **Jenny Adams**

มหานิยม
mahaniyom

PHOTOGRAPHS: **DOF SKYGROUND; GASTROFILM ASIA; TURQUOISE TRUCK CREATIVE; MAHANIYOM**

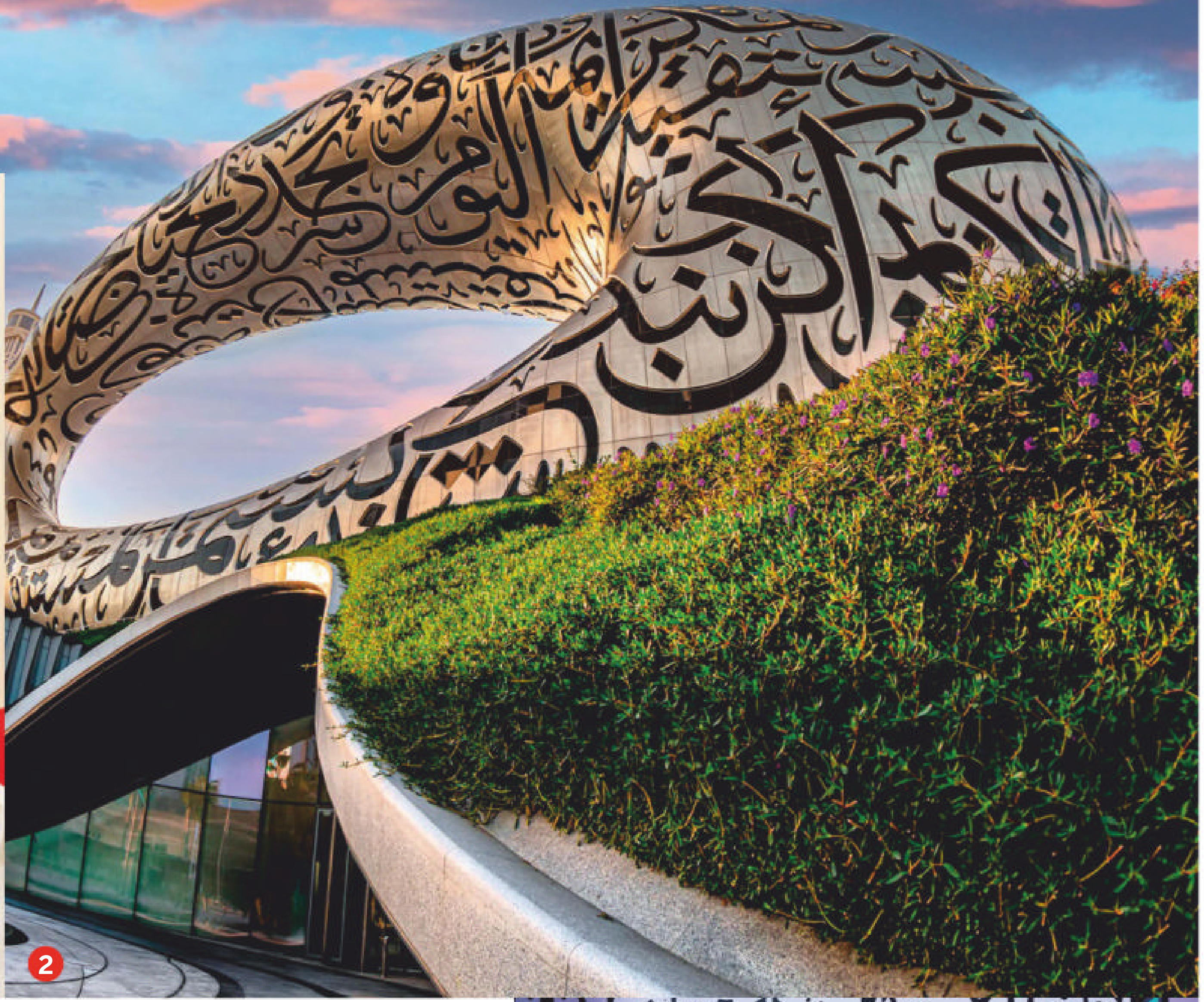
The Thai government banned alcohol sale in 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It lifted restrictions late in 2021, and when bars reopened shortly after, Bangkok's nightlife went into overdrive. Over the past year, several high-end cocktail dens have opened, featuring cool urban design and discerning drinks that wouldn't be out of place in the UK's Shoreditch or the US' Lower East Side—think dim lights, rare vermouths, and a creative crowd that wants something more subtle than the city's blinged-out rooftop scene. All are in neighbourhoods along the Chao Phraya River, giving visitors an effortless way to stay out late.

In Chinatown, eight-month-old Independence Bar comes from the owners of Teens of Thailand, which is credited with elevating Bangkok's cocktail scene. The walls are decorated by Thai graffiti artists, and the cocktails, like the sharp Daiquiri de Jerez, are first-rate. Opium Bar, 10 minutes away, is tucked inside the deepest part of Chinatown's old market. It's an homage to top local chef Pam Utharntharm's ancestors, who immigrated to Thailand from China and opened a traditional medicine store inside a shophouse. The bar sits one floor above her celebrated restaurant, Potong, with green barstools, herbal kombuchas, and four house-made gins.

To the south, Mahaniyom Cocktail Bar, which opened in the funky Bang Rak neighbourhood last March, strives to minimise waste. Everything—from Wagyu beef fat to squid ink, mirin to fermented pineapple peel—makes it into the signature drinks, served in the glow of two blazing neon tigers adorning the wall.

This wouldn't be Bangkok if there wasn't a great hotel bar in the mix. At Stella, inside the Capella Bangkok down the river, the cocktail menu pays homage to Asia. Order a City of Khai, inspired by the Isan culture and dusted with toasted rice powder, as a nightcap. If you've planned well, bed will only be an elevator ride away.

Clockwise from top left: **Opium Bar is on the upper floors of a 120-year-old building in Chinatown; drinking and Oaxaca Old Fashioned at Opium Bar; shrimp toast at Opium Bar; inside Mahaniyom Cocktail Bar**



PLAY AND DISPLAY

Experimental museum design and interactive art exhibitions are dialling up the wow factor globally

At the Museum of Ice Cream's latest outpost in Singapore, don't expect dusty cabinets and formaldehyde. Instead, there's a dragon-themed playground, a pink and yellow jungle with 10,000 (fake) bananas and the largest sprinkle pool in the world—part of a new breed of design-forward "experiums". Try the Moon-inspired ball pit, a collaboration with NASA, or cult designer Camille Walala's graphic maze in Chicago—both from the Color Factory (pictured in images 1, 3, 5 and 6), which hosts one-of-a-kind exhibitions. Meanwhile, Dubai's new, solar-powered, torus-shaped Museum of the Future (pictured in images 2 and 4) by Killa Design has multisensory immersions into how life will be in 2071. Museums once tended to be in heritage buildings but the latest iterations have genre-pushing designs, such as Ma Yansong's upcoming spaceship-like Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in LA; Danish studio Dorte Mandrup's The Whale, an undulating structure that will rise out of the landscape on the rocky shore of Norway's Andøya island; and the egg-shaped Seoul Robot and AI Museum, which will launch this year. Bengaluru's Museum of Art and Photography, designed by Mathew and Ghosh Architects, offers an immersive experience with 60,000 art works on display, including pieces by Raja Ravi Varma and Jamini Roy. The upcoming Grand Egyptian Museum, a five-million-square-foot space devoted to ancient Egypt designed by Dublin's Heneghan Peng Architects, has been dubbed the world's largest museum. Museums have rarely seemed as beholden to ambitions as right now. EMMA LOVE

PHOTOGRAPHS: **MATT HAAS; JULIA ROBBS**

DOTTED BY DESIGN

Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's signature infinity dots and neo-minimalism have led to a legion of fans in the pre- and post-Instagram worlds. For her second collaboration with Louis Vuitton, the artist's iconic motifs have been printed on suits, bikinis, swim trunks, puffer jackets and more to create collectibles. The collaboration is available worldwide on louisvuitton.com

STORIES OF THE EAST

Curator Nusrat Ahmed on Manchester Museum's very first South Asia Gallery

How does it feel to be able to bring your heritage to the world through this gallery? Representing and preserving South Asian history in museums is long overdue. I am a first-generation British-born South Asian person and when I was growing up, I felt that I didn't belong in museums. If I had the opportunity of seeing myself within these spaces, then finding a way to connect to my heritage would have been far easier. It is wonderful to be part of something so special, and I hope my grandchildren will feel that they belong in galleries and museums.

What does this represent for the South Asian diaspora? I hope that the gallery represents the diversity of South Asia, and shines a light on unknown stories like that of Anna Mani, an inspirational woman who measured the skies. She was an Indian meteorologist who, in the 1950s, developed one of the first-ever devices to measure the atmospheric ozone.

What are some of the featured themes and artefacts? The gallery is divided into anthologies including Lived Environments, Movement and Empire, Sound Music and Dance, and more. There are stories of what it's like to be a young British-Asian person today; there are stories about the LGBTQ+ community; there are stories about the environment and much more. Diverse objects [and displays] explore what it means to be British-Asian today.—SHRADHA SHAHANI

Open Tuesday-Sunday; museum.manchester.ac.uk

PAST PERFECT

Historian Sudeshna Guha has carefully curated a selection of artefacts across the ages to question the interpretation of the past. *A History of India through* 75 *Objects* (Hachette India/₹1,299) studies the changing perceptions of these iconic objects to show that history is anything but static.

PHOTOGRAPHS: @LOUISVUITTON; MARYAM WAHID; NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI; SUDESHNA GUHA

BORN TO BE WILD

These fledgling national parks have us all aflutter to get out there. By **Jessica Vincent**

GISHWATI-MUKURA, RWANDA

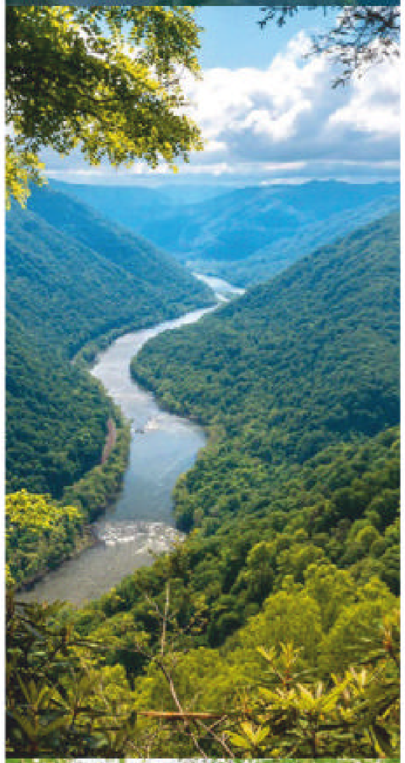
After the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, the Gishwati rainforest in north-western Rwanda–home to chimpanzees, monkeys, and hundreds of bird species–lost 98 per cent of its habitat to illegal mining and livestock farming. But after becoming a protected UNESCO reserve and national park, a reforestation project by the Forest of Hope Association, government of Rwanda, and other partners has seen the reserve grow from 600 hectares to 1,570 hectares. With Wilderness Safaris, the association opened its first guesthouse and campsite, where visitors have exclusive access to the park's hiking trails, tree nursery and chimp- and monkey-tracking tours. Guests also get to learn from healers and craftsmen whose families have called the forest home for generations.

VJOSA RIVER, ALBANIA

The Vjosa—running from its source in Greece's Pindus Mountains through Albania and into the Adriatic—is one of Europe's last wild rivers. Hydropower projects in 2016 threatened the 168-mile waterway, home to critically endangered species like the Balkan lynx and Egyptian vulture. But a campaign led by local activists and tour operators like Much Better Adventures encouraged the Albanian government to grant it national park status, making it Europe's first wild river national park. Travellers can packraft downriver from the village of Permet to Gjirokastra and take in Vjosa's forested canyons and turquoise water in the best way. At night, guests camp along the riverbank and look out for otters, kingfishers, and the lesser spotted eagles, which are as rare as the name suggests.

NEW RIVER GORGE, WEST VIRGINIA

Over millions of years, West Virginia's New River has been carving itself deep into the lush Appalachian wilderness. Now, the New River Gorge is the USA's newest national park—70,000 acres of densely forested hills around the 980-foot-deep gorge, with a spot for hiking, biking, rafting, and rock climbing in the natural habitat of bald eagles, ospreys and black bears. The 83-mile road trip around the park takes in the New River Gorge Bridge, the longest single-span steel arch bridge in the Americas; the famous horseshoe bend vista from Grandview, and the 1,500-foot-wide Sandstone Falls. In autumn, Amtrak runs an 1800s train along the old tracks that follow the river. The pick of the stays is Country Road Cabins, with 23 wooden treehouses and shacks, which remain just the right side of Appalachian kitsch.



Clockwise from top: **Gishwati-Mukura; New River Gorge; Country Road Cabin; a kingfisher; Vjosa River; golden monkey in the Gishwati rainforest**

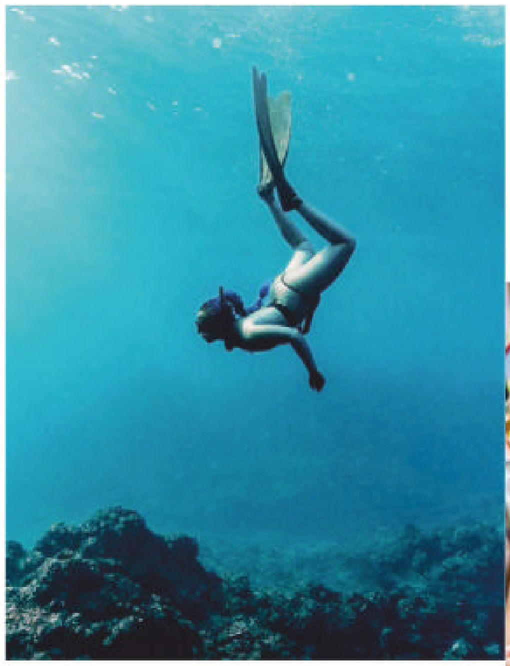
PHOTOGRAPHS: **HANNAH BAILEY; CHRIS ROCHE/WILDERNESS SAFARIS; TIZARD IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; WILDERNESS SAFARIS**

ASK A LOCAL

ZANDILE NDHLOVU

South Africa's first black African freediving instructor shares her favourite spots along Cape Town's southern peninsula

"The ocean is the only place where I am perfect as I am," says Zandile Ndhlovu, pioneering freediving instructor and founder of The Black Mermaid Foundation, which advocates for diversity in the waters of South Africa. "It's where I feel safest in this body." Born hundreds of miles from the coast in Soweto, Ndhlovu's love affair with the ocean began on a snorkelling trip to Bali. But as she learnt more about diving, she realised that she was often the only black person underwater. Now based in Cape Town, she picks the beaches and cafés along the city's coastline that she loves to visit.



Clockwise from top: **Zandile Ndhlovu; Dalebrook Café, Windmill Beach; Ndhlovu underwater**

WINDMILL BEACH

"What brought me to Cape Town was its beautiful, bracing cold waters. I wake up, pack a bag with swimsuits by local designer Julia Buchanan, and meet friends at Windmill Beach to watch the sun rise. Everybody is silent; there's such gratitude. Then everyone rushes into the water. We'll swim and dive and just laugh together."

MILLER'S POINT

"Sometimes I'll gather with friends at Miller's Point. We'll bring our marine permits, suit up, and grab some groceries—from the sea. We look for shellfish such as periwinkles and sea urchins, and kelp. Roushanna Gray, founder of the foraging company Veld and Sea, taught me what to look for in the Cape's wilds. She offers seasonal courses that you can book."

THE SWEETEST THING

"Just a few minutes from Windmill Beach is a patisserie called The Sweetest Thing, which has amazing coffee and almond croissants. Further down the coast, Dalebrook Café has a nutty vegan cake that is so good it will make you cry. When I walk in, everyone knows my order: a big oat milk cappuccino."

LONG BEACH

"Long Beach in Kommetjie has the most mind-blowing sunsets. I'll sit with a friend and watch the sun go down. Picture all the colours you can imagine—pink, orange, purple—and then all the surfers catching waves in the background. It makes me feel like I live in heaven. Night-time swims here are also amazing; there's a sheltered bay, so it's safer."

THE COURTYARD CAFÉ

"If I want something substantial, I go for the falafel wraps at this café in Kalk Bay. If I could eat only one thing for the rest of my life, it would be chickpeas."

CAPE POINT NATURE RESERVE

"If I have the afternoon off, I'll make my way to the mountains. I like to hike down to Venus Pools in the Cape Point Nature Reserve, where I can journal and paint. I'll pack a picnic and laze in the sun until the early evening."

FISHERMAN'S GARDEN

"I always get the vegan garden burger with french fries and a drink, and a glass of South African wine, like a Chenin Blanc—something light and fruity. Durbanville Hills and Spier are my favourites."

Ndhlovu was speaking to Melanie van Zyl

PHOTOGRAPHS: **JACKI BRUNIQUEL; JAY CABOZ**

COMING SOON TO THE SANDS NEAR YOU

Abu Dhabi's cultural landscape is constantly evolving, welcoming debutants and hosting iconic events. Here's why you should be in the Emirati capital this year. By **Ria Gupta**

Clockwise, from top left: **scenes from the Ultra Music Festival; sand dunes; Comic Con; helicopter view of Abu Dhabi; an F1 car; city's skyline; Comic Con cosplay**

Once nothing more than a barren strip of desert, Abu Dhabi now helms the UAE's cultural revolution in more ways than one. The opening of Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017 threw open the doors for a global wave to usher into the Arab world. The iconic Yas Marina Circuit, which joined the Formula One calendar in 2009, is set to host the Grand Prix races until 2030. Adding an apt soundtrack to this cultural movement is the emerging electronica scene that's revamping the Emirate's music landscape. In 2023, this desert city has its calendar packed with a slew of international events, big-ticket concerts, and grand openings. All the more reason to start booking now.

MUSIC This year, Abu Dhabi is all set to up the ante on its music scene. The city will host some of the biggest names in the international music circuit at festivals spanning several genres from rock to rap, pop, and electronica. **Ultra Music Festival** is coming to the Middle East, bringing with it the world's top electronica artists to Etihad Park in Yas Island on 4 and 5 March. In the same month, Travis Scott, Divine, and other popular rappers will perform at the **Wireless Festival,** a leading London-based festival which will also be making its Middle East debut in Abu Dhabi on 11 March. Sting, Blackpink, and Imagine Dragons entertained the city in January, and now, the stage is being set for stars like Andrea Bocelli, Post Malone, John Legend, Kendrick Lamar, and well-known bands like Swedish House Mafia.

SPORTS The Yas Marina Circuit on Yas Island is gearing up to host the three-day **Abu Dhabi Grand Prix** event from 24 to 26 November. The race will conclude the 2023 FIA Formula One World Championship, which, for the first time, will be running 23 races in a season—the highest in any season. Race-view suites remain a highlight at W Abu Dhabi in Yas Island, which stands right atop the racetrack. Head there to watch the spectacle from the comfort of your room, or prop yourself on the Main Grandstand, which overlooks the home straight and offers a direct view of the stunning pyrotechnics that Abu Dhabi is known for.

FAN FESTIVALS The **Middle East Film & Comic Con** is bringing pop culture to Abu Dhabi this year, with film and OTT favourites—from actor Matt Smith of *House of the Dragon* to art director Mike Peraza of *Aladdin*—flying down for a rendezvous with fans. A riot of colours and characters will take centre stage at the event as people from around the world will dress their way into the cosplay competition.

NEW ATTRACTIONS **SeaWorld Abu Dhabi**—the first Middle Eastern outpost of the classic American theme park—will become a realm of marine-themed immersive experiences, with six different marine habitats and the region's largest multispecies aquarium. **Snow Abu Dhabi** will open on Reem Island as one of the world's largest indoor snow parks, with rides and dining areas across 10,000 sq ft. Think sub-zero temperatures in Abu Dhabi with snow up to your ankles.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES

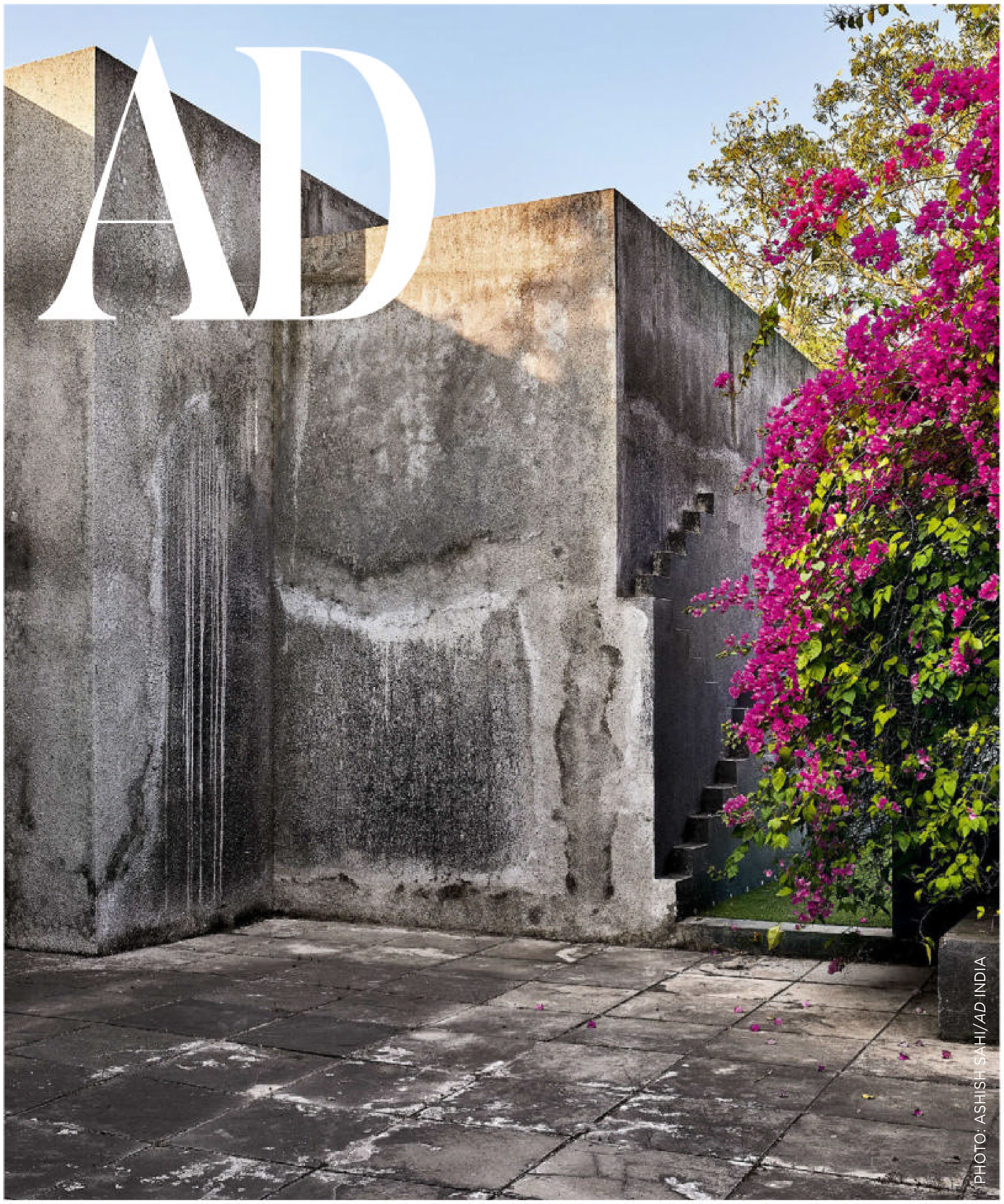


PHOTO: ASHISH SAHI/*AD* INDIA

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD

Condé Nast Traveller

READERS' TRAVEL AWARDS 2022

In November, winners of the 12th annual *Condé Nast Traveller* Readers' Travel Awards were honoured at an intimate luncheon at The St. Regis, Mumbai. The sunny afternoon hosted by Divia Thani, Global Editorial Director, *Condé Nast Traveler,* was filled with sparkling wine and conversations among stalwarts of the hospitality and F&B business in India. The event celebrated the winners of 2022 as chosen by you and was extra special because of all that the industry had achieved despite two challenging years in the midst of a global pandemic. In her opening speech, Thani addressed the changing landscape of travel, the 2023 global trends and the exciting road ahead. With floral decor by Bloom Barn and hors d'oeuvres and gourmet bowls from The St. Regis kitchen, this was an afternoon to remember in more ways than one.

Condé Nast Traveller
READERS' TRAVEL AWARDS 2022
ASSOCIATE PARTNER
CHANDON
VENUE PARTNER
ST REGIS
MUMBAI

The RTA stage

Puneet Chhatwal of IHCL, *Condé Nast Traveller's* Divia Thani and Anuraag Bhatnagar of The Leela

Marriott's Khushnooma Kapadia

Silki Sehgal, Natassia Balsara of The Oberoi

IHCL's Parveen Chander

Akasa Air's Aditya Ghosh with Condé Nast India's Alex Kuruvilla

Armaity Amaria of Condé Nast India, Kunal Munshaw of Avant Garde Consulting, and Sheetal Munshaw of Atout France

Ritu Sharma, Switzerland Tourism

Chen Sy Yen of Singapore Airlines with Salil Deshpande, *Condé Nast Traveller*

IHCL's Renu Basu with ITC's Arif Patel

Pankaj Parihar, Condé Nast India

Condé Nast Traveller
READERS' TRAVEL AWARDS 2022
Carissa Nimah, Damcho Rinzin of Department of Tourism, Bhutan with Deepa Harris of BrandsWeLove

Richa Singh of Natural Diamond Council with Dilshad Arora, Condé Nast India

Amanpreet Singh Bajaj and Prasidha Menon, Airbnb

Shobha Mohan of RARE with Bhupendra Singh of Premkunj, Udaipur

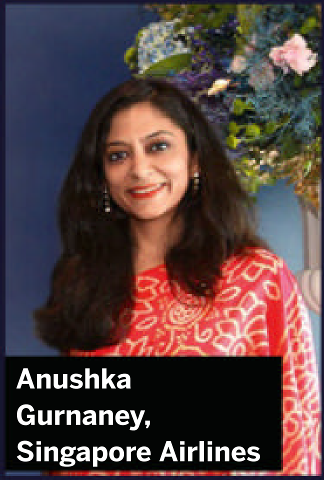
Gautam Narang, Saloni Mahajan Narang of Paras Corporation with Ananda's Mahesh Natarajan (centre)

Hitesh Singh Rathore

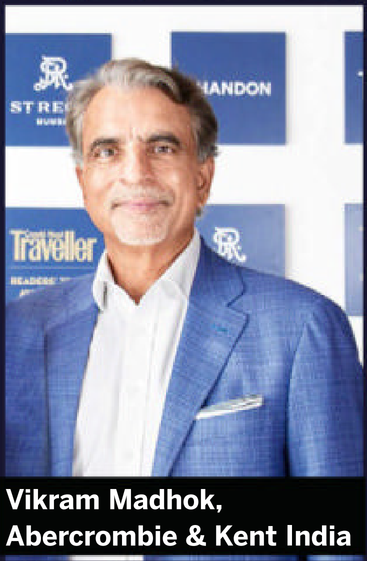
Macarons from Le15 Pâtisserie

Deepti Sampat, Vinod Kannan and Bryna Dsouza of Vistara

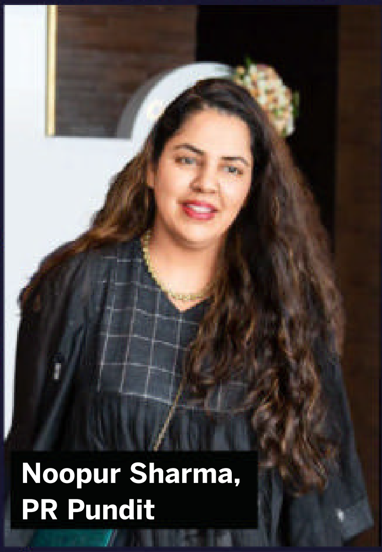
Chef J.P. Singh of ITC Hotels


Anushka Gurnaney, Singapore Airlines

Christel Anthony, Ipsita Das and Delshad Siganporia, Moët Hennessy India


Vikram Madhok, Abercrombie & Kent India

Anjali Mehra of The Leela with Marriott's Saadhvi Mehra


Noopur Sharma, PR Pundit

Mruga Kumari and Priti Singh, Samode India

SoulMedia's Meenakshi Sachdev Varma and Anuradha Kapoor with Owais Altaf Syed, Empyrean Skyview

Devendra Parulekar, SaffronStays

Varun Chhibber, The St. Regis Mumbai

PHOTOGRAPHS: RAHUL KIZHAKKE VEETTIL; CHETAN CHONKAR/CCPL

Travel content creator, Preethi Parthasarathy

Karan Singh, Aakriti Batra of 1524 Delhi

MakeMyTrip's Vipul Prakash

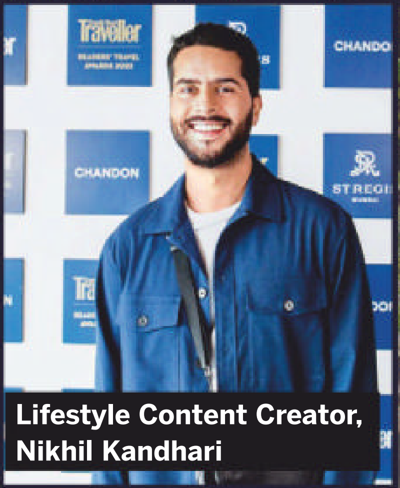
IHCL's Shaheen Rajguru and Nisha Dhage

Richa Sharma of ITC Hotels

Anushka Talreja of BrandsWeLove with Harry Fernandes of Aman

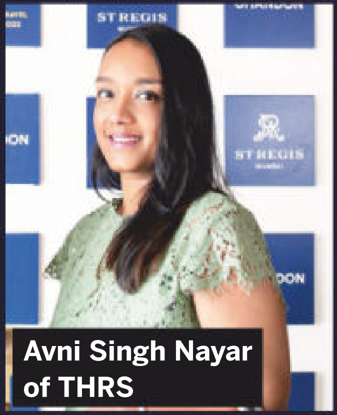
Rakhee Lalvani and Monica Dhull

Hita Almeida of Heavens Portfolio

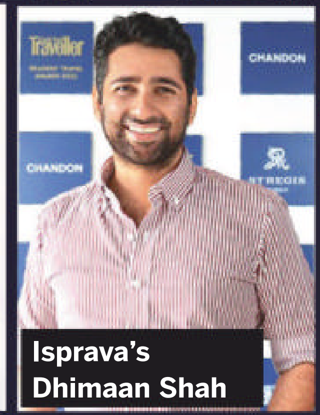


Lifestyle Content Creator, Nikhil Kandhari

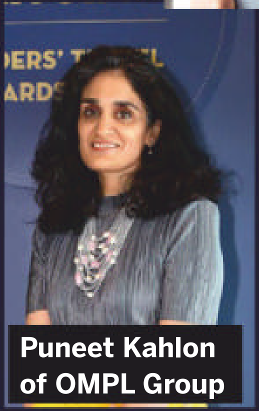
The Leela's Anupam Dasgupta and Nishant Agarwal



Avni Singh Nayar of THRS



Isprava's Dhimaan Shah



Puneet Kahlon of OMPL Group

Vishal Singh

Team CNT

Sonam Babani

PHOTOGRAPHS: RAHUL KIZHAKKE VEETTIL; CHETAN CHONKAR/CCPL

AD

PHOTO: BIKRAMJIT BOSE/*AD* INDIA

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN WESTLAKE/GALLERY STOCK; BEN RICHARDS

GETAWAY

WHAT'S NEW IN VIETNAM

A year on from reopening, the country offers luxury stays, elevated cuisine, hip cocktail bars, and more, finds **David Kaye**

From left: **spots at Regent Phu Quoc; a local cycles under colourful lanterns along the Thu Bon River, Hoi An; The Haflington, Hanoi**

From the capital Hanoi in the north to the central coast and down to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam is buzzing with some deliriously good new places to eat, drink, and sleep. Here's a pick:

HANOI

HOTELS The Capella Hanoi *(doubles from ₹30,000; capellahotels.com)* boldly threw open its gilded doors in early 2021. Never one for understatement, its designer, Bill Bensley, created a 'petite auberge' inspired by the nearby Hanoi Opera House. Each floor has a theme: drama, actors, artists. And each of its 47 rooms highlights one of them, with hand-painted murals and portraits of era-defining figures. Inside are marble bathrooms, alluring king beds, and wrought-iron balconies that add a touch of vintage. **RESTAURANTS** A Bản Mountain Dew draws from Chef Viet's memories growing up in the Son La province west of Hanoi to serve tangy, textural dishes, and some fun, outré servings like fried bugs amidst atmospheric decor that references paddy fields and ethnic 'upside down' architecture. On the hip Chân Cầm Street, Chapter Dining & Grill Hanoi serves technically accomplished cuisine with a lick of flame and a twist of smoke. You enter through the open kitchen—Chef Quang Dung's way of stimulating the diners' expectations and introducing them to the people behind the food. The cuisine plays around with street food as fine dining, like the spreadeagled chicken foot stuffed with homemade chorizo.

At Khói Restaurant, Chef Hoang Tung has brought in George Bloomfield to infuse Vietnamese ingredient-centric dishes with flavours of the grill and Japanese accents. Expect quick bites like duck liver, bacon furikake, and onion soy, small plates of sake-brined black chicken and wasabi-marinated baby octopus, and sharing plates like the seven-day dry-aged pigeon with umeshu.

In the basement of the Capella, the Koki House Of Senses is a chic space in thrall of all things Japanese. Koki's Akio Lounge serves cocktails themed after towns: Nikko and its cherry blossom, Oita and its bubbling hot springs, and so on. At Hibana, Chef Yoshida and team serve cuts of premium Yaeyama Kyori beef sourced exclusively from Okinawa's Yaeyama Islands, once they've shown you a certificate of authenticity. **BARS** Hanoi's The Haflington is like a period movie set with an elegant wooden tasting counter for imbibing fine single malts, a living room with chesterfields and a fireplace, lots of mysterious jars and vitrines, and a large fossilised 'dinosaur' hanging above the bar in the attic. The same team has opened 3PIAS Clubhouse, inspired by Vietnamese 'hội quán'—places for gatherings for the Chinese community. The space spans two floors, with bar bites, oysters, wine and modernist cocktails. It all feels like an opium dream, with DJs and a smoke-breathing dragon.

HO CHI MINH

HOTELS In the buzzy District 2, Mia Saigon *(doubles from ₹16,100; miasaigon.com)* stares dreamily beyond its pool and across the Saigon River. It's a refined artsy hotel to explore this part of the city from. **RESTAURANTS** At Da Vittorio Saigon, Milanese Head Chef Matteo Fontana serves signature dishes like their Vittorio-style

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS SCHALKX; BEN RICHARDS

Previous pages, from left: **traditional vendors in a market in Vietnam; local Vietnamese pho breakfast at Zannier Hotels Bai San Ho**

> "Hanoi's The Haflington is like a period movie set with an elegant wooden tasting counter along with a living room with chesterfields and a fireplace"

paccheri pasta, a splashy made-at-the-table affair, their Egg 'à la Egg' with Royal Oscietra Caviar, and a sumptuous Tiramisu in the Chocolate Sphere, all served with a kind of synchronised dance by the staff.

The chic, modern space at Å by T.U.N.G harks back to Chef Hoang Tung's years in Scandinavia. 'Northern Lights' flicker across the dining room's skylight, a menacing stalactite hangs above the winding staircase and 'icebergs' protrude from the wall. The seasonal menu lists each of its 18+ courses as a pair of ingredients: eel-garlic, lobster-scallion, beef-pho. This allows the playful chef lots of room for surprise. The pho, for example, comes as a thin rectangle of A5 Wagyu seasoned with chẩm chéo—a kind of highland chimichurri—and topped with a pho broth jelly. Da Nang-based Chef Summer Le has long championed central Vietnam's cuisine, commanding an impressive list of diners that includes former New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern. Now, Le and her restaurant have moved to Ho Chi Minh City. At Nén Light, her Ho Chi Minh City outpost, 'conscious cuisine' is delivered as a set 'Sto:ry Menu', where you even get to choose the amount of tales the server tells you—quiet, classic, or eager!

Once the preserve of wealthy expats in secluded compounds, District 2's Thao Dien enclave is now blossoming with bars and restaurants. New on the scene is TRE Dining, whose terrace offers breathtaking views of the Landmark 81 building across the river while the open counter turns out modern Vietnamese cuisine with Asian touches.

While Madame Lam describes itself as a contemporary Vietnamese restaurant, the decor is reassuringly old-school and the cuisine is all about flavour-first classics that don't stray too far from the originals. There is fried soft-shell crab with a mango and jellyfish salad, and homemade banana ice cream as Chef Cuong conjures up flavours of his childhood, often giving them a little twist like adding some sour mango to his bo luc lac.

Part omakase restaurant, part vinyl listening room, Kanpai epitomises the eclectic bunch of locals and expats who call Thao Dien home. The music segues between Roy Ayers and rare groove as guests switch between sashimi, sushi, and sake. Nearby is CLAY Saigon, which exudes the confidence of a restaurant team in full stride, balancing a modern eatery serving pan-Asian cuisine with dishes like pan-seared Japanese scallops and barramundi with a tom yum emulsion, and a bar with cocktails like their coconut rum-fuelled Meanwhile In Bali.

BARS History meets intoxication at The Triêu Institute, named after a third-century war hero who repelled the advancing Chinese Eastern Wu Dynasty rule. The range of gins served here are distilled just outside of →

Clockwise, from top left: **CLAY Saigon; Madame Lam; aerial view of Zannier Hotels Bai San Ho; Hybrid Saigon; Å by T.U.N.G**

the city, in Cu Chi—the rural district better known for its wartime tunnels. Across two chic floors at this address in District 1, elevated food pairings infused with botanicals—grilled octopus, Black Angus steak, and citrus parfait help soak up all the gin. Nearby, at Hybrid Saigon, a rotovap whirls and a centrifuge hums to pour out ingredients for cocktails like their Death's Choke Sazerac made with local cacao, and their umami-rich Mushroom Maestro.

At Mùa Craft Sake in District 3, they use ST25—award-winning Vietnamese rice—as one of their key ingredients to make sake. At their new flagship outlet, they serve their sake in its classic form or gently flavoured with the tang of berries or a hint of citrus, by the glass or in a tasting flight. In the open kitchen is Chef Tru Lang, who has created made-in-Vietnam renditions of izakaya classics like grilled Ha Long Bay oysters with miso butter, Vietnamese beef tataki with wild pepper and garlic, and more.

Ủ Bar is a modern cocktail bar with a very Vietnamese soul. Contemporary indie tracks by Hanoi band Ngọt are followed by '60s Vietnamese nhạc vàng (or golden era music) while this upstairs bar serves pho-accented beef tataki and perfectly balanced Martinis with mandarin and lemon balm. 'Ủ' means to ferment—so there's lots of funky flavours on the bar and food menus.

> "Once the preserve of wealthy expats, District 2's Thao Dien is now blossoming with bars and restaurants"

Elsewhere in District 1, Enigma is like a library on a space station. Mirrors and polished surfaces add to the feeling of weightlessness, as the windowless space glows with candy apple red and pine-coloured neon. The stellar bar team, led by World Class Vietnam winner Vu Ngoc, serves signature cocktails in a menu that incorporates ingredients from across Vietnam: mangoes from Hoa Loc, sarsi from Dak Lak, and shrimp salt from Tay Ninh.

ELSEWHERE

On Phu Quoc island, Regent Phu Quoc *(doubles from ₹27,300; phuquoc.regenthotels.com)* has found a serene spot on Long Beach on the island's west coast. A short ride away, inside Sun Grand City is Aura Restaurant - Fusion Cuisine, that pairs classic cocktails with playfully presented dishes.

Down Vietnam's S-shaped curve of coast, there's the historic, but underexplored Imperial City of Hue, with its new design-conscious hotel, ANhill Boutique *(doubles from ₹9,700; anhillvietnam.com)*that feels like a writer's retreat. Further south is the booming beach city of Da Nang, and beside it, historic Hoi An. The New World Hoiana Hotel *(doubles from ₹7,400; hoiana.newworldhotels.com)* that's recently opened is part of the next phase of the Hoiana Resort complex that includes a casino and a golf course, among other things.

A short flight or a six-hour drive on is the up-and-coming beach town of Quy Nhon, and the anew Maia Resort *(doubles from ₹14,590; quynhon.maiaresorts.com)*, with its private villas that look out onto Phuong Mai Bay. Not far beyond that, set on a peninsula, is Zannier Hotels Bai San Ho *(doubles from ₹34,150; zannierhotels.com)*. This 73-villa resort has a mix of paddy field, hill pool, beach pool, and grand bay pool villas, and three immersive restaurants. The place is so secluded that there is nothing to interrupt you and your thoughts.

PHOTOGRAPH: **FREDERIK WISSINK**

WHERE TO STAY

PORTRAIT MILANO

A new outpost of Leonardo Ferragamo's Portrait hotel brand reimagines one of Milan's historic buildings, writes **Stephanie Rafanelli**. Photographs by **Davide Lovatti**

A grubby morning moon lingers over the baroque colonnades of Milan's new Piazza del Quadrilatero like the ghost of the city's old image. The sky is a crisp blue, swept clean of the dull cloud of business that once hung over the forward-looking Italian design capital. Pale beech leaves create fairy lights over Liberty-style Napoleonic and rationalist palazzos by the Luigi Rovati Foundation, one of the new museums contributing to Milan's post-Brexit emergence as one of Europe's most well-connected culture and lifestyle hubs. After the clean-up initiatives of 2015's World Expo, a new sustainable metro now speeds in minutes from Linate Airport to the central Quadrilatero della Moda, the shopping district that covers more than a square mile.

"After decades of self-improvement, Milan has gone from a city known for business to an important global reference for quality of living," says Leonardo Ferragamo, the Florentine responsible for the new piazza, who is the founder of the boutique Lungarno Collection of hotels, as well as the chairman of his late father Salvatore's eponymous fashion house. His ambitious restoration of an archiepiscopal seminary is the third installment of his Portrait brand, admired for its impeccable Italian heritage, leather-smooth Tuscan craftsmanship, and locations just an elegant stride from Italy's high-fashion promenades. The collection, founded in 1995, also has a monopoly of curated four- and five-star hotels along Florence's Arno, an extension of the Salvatore Ferragamo headquarters where Ferragamo's father hosted his Hollywood clientele.

Commissioned in 1565 by the Archbishop of Milan and future saint Charles Borromeo, the baroque religious college also mirrors the story of Milan. It became a barrack under Napoleon and a hospital during World War I, was bombed in WWII and then restored by Piero Portaluppi. Portrait, with its concept of privileged access to a city from a fantasy "home", has always foregone overt Ferragamo branding in favour of an inclusive celebration of Italian achievement. In Rome, it's the Dolce Vita era; in Florence, the heyday of the Pitti Palace and haute couture. "In Milan, it's a tribute to entrepreneurship and design," says Ferragamo. "The new way the city looked to the future after the war, when the energy of Italy exploded." In this spirit, Portrait also aims to create "a new destination for the Milanese", with a ground-floor lifestyle hub in the seminary courtyard, the new public piazza, and a pedestrian cut-through across the Quadrilatero.

The seminary's baroque entrance was once known to the traffic-harassed Milanese only for being the preferred spot of Pedro, a homeless man who assisted them with parking. It was stumbled upon by Lungarno's CEO, Valeriano Antonioli, in 2014, but the seminary was adamant that it would never be made into a hotel. It took four years of negotiations, plus a competition, for Lungarno to win the contract. In 2018, architect Michele de Lucchi, of Milan's Memphis design group, began renovations of the four-floor granite structure with La Soprintendenza, the Italian heritage body. The hotel soft-launched last November with the flagship store of up-and-coming leather jeweller Maria Sole Ferragamo, Leonardo's daughter. This is now joined by the first Italian location of the Monte-Carlo-founded restaurant Beefbar, as well as a second outlet of Milanese fashion emporium Antonia. There's also a basement pool with the columned grandeur of a Roman bath, and a spa run by the Italian "biohacking" clinic Longevity Suite will follow.

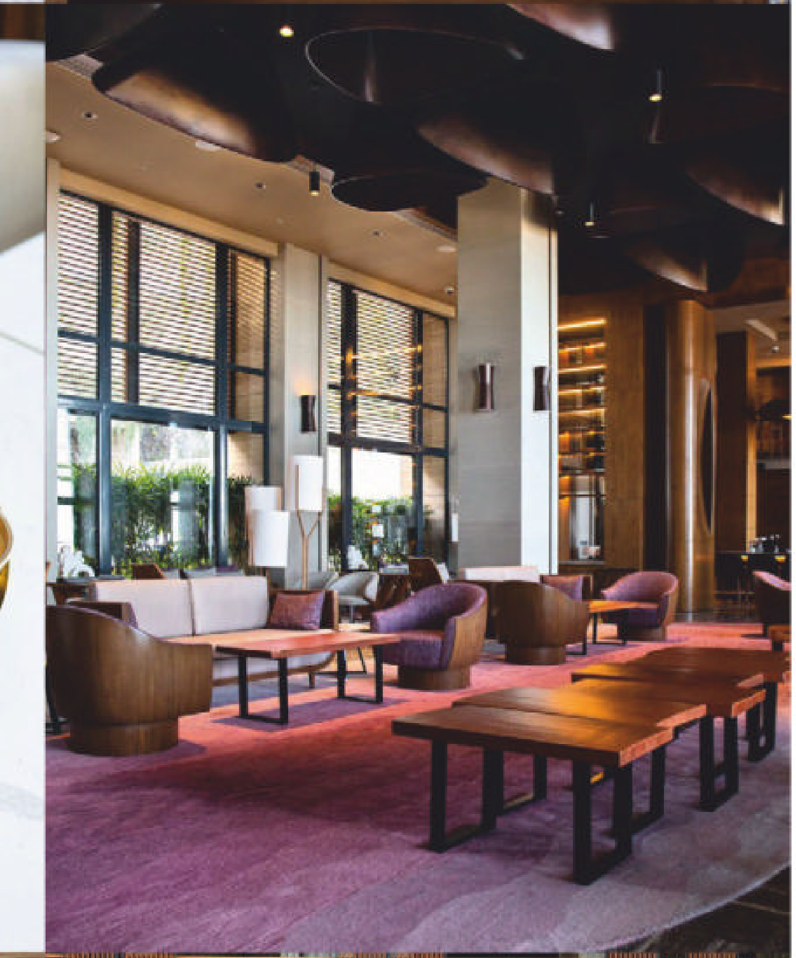
The gauntlet of transforming the monument's interior into a connoisseurial Milanese home was laid at the feet of Florentine designer Michele Bönan, who helped define Portrait's location-tailored vision: "It's like a gentleman with many houses. They belong to the same owner, but every city has its own logic." Here, that is the semantics of Milanese history, art, and design, reborn through Florentine craftsmanship. Cardinal-red velvet cushions at once suggest La Scala and Gio Ponti chairs. Lacquer and brass coffee tables recall the rich golds and crushed blacks of Renaissance art at the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, whose library was founded by Borromeo's cousin, Federico. Two modernist paintings subliminally recall Leonardo da Vinci's *Portrait of a Musician*. Education and archives are running themes. The library at Portrait is a comprehensive resource on Milanese architecture, design, and fashion, including tomes about Prada and Armani. Sleekly lit photographs of design icons, such as surrealist architect Carlo Mollino's 1955 bentwood coffee tables, hang alongside Salvatore Ferragamo's patents for his modern shoe inventions.

Reached by lifts as studded as travel trunks, the 73 rooms and suites are on the second and third floors, the former with direct access to the loggia, which functions as a colonial balcony over the piazza. Past walnut-lined corridors inspired by the city's iconic entrance halls, my suite is a 920-sq ft modernist Milanese apartment, where black lampshades with bronzed lining throw golden-era light. The Carrara marble bathrooms have the glamour of Art Deco powder rooms; the walnut kitchenette could be a bar on the Orient Express. The coat wardrobe has rattan pocket doors, with leather handles twisted like antelope horns. In the bedroom, a mirrored door can slide over the oval windows, creating complete blackout, and for the emperor bed, dressed in piped Frette sheets, there are seven pillow options. Portrait's young staff offers zippy, American-style service, the "Lifestyle team" securing guides with privileged access, hard-to-score tickets, and tables at Norbert Niederkofler's Horto.

> "For Portrait, every city has its own logic. Here, that is the semantics of Milanese history, art and design, reborn through Florentine craftsmanship"

Meanwhile, 10_11 restaurant is all geometric boiserie, with two 39-foot-long bars straight out of the aperitivo golden age. It has been entrusted to 32-year-old Alberto Quadrio, alumnus of Alain Ducasse's and Gualtiero Marchesi's establishments, who turns out sharing plates such as riso al salto (saffron risotto) topped with ossobuco. A more classically gourmet restaurant will focus on antique feast-day dishes. It's a credit to Ferragamo that he bypassed star-haloed chefs to bet on young talent; it also reflects a youthful Milan, after an influx from London. Portrait's direct and inclusive contribution moves the city on from the old exclusive luxury of the Four Seasons, Bulgari, and Mandarin Oriental. Last year, Casa Cipriani arrived and the Park Hyatt reemerged after a makeover, with (Rocco Forte's) Carlton Milano and J.K. Place to follow. While all these openings are putting Milan on the lifestyle map, few can claim to have elevated the fabric of the city.

PORTRAIT MILANO, Corso Venezia, 11, 20121 Milano MI, Italy. *(Rooms start from ₹82,303; lungarnocollection.com)*



THE WESTIN RESORT & SPA, HIMALAYAS

This new hotel near Rishikesh is set to become a family favourite.

By **Smitha Menon**. Photographs by **Rahul Kizhakke Veettil**

In Rishikesh, the holy town on the banks of the Ganga, there is an immutable rhythm of life. As the sun rises—its golden light turning tree tops into disco balls that catch and throw dazzling colours—temple goers, white-water rafters and yogis rise, humming with the energy they derive from the mighty river.

I gaze upon its shimmering surface from my perch at a private villa overlooking the valley at The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas, a new 141-key property on the Shivalik Hills. Concentric circles, inspired by drops of water and tree rings, run through 12 acres of the hotel that offers guests a range of accommodation options—from balcony rooms to garden suites and private villas. Each room, with a modern, earthy aesthetic, is kitted out with Westin's signature bath and bed programmes as well as private balconies with arguably the best views in town.

Built to offer travellers an oasis of calm, The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas ensures thoughtful hospitality right from the get-go. Our airport pickup comes with a music selection menu that ranges from Coke Studio hits to retro pop by The Beatles, who spent seven weeks in Rishikesh in 1968, creating some of their best work. Hoping to imbibe just an ounce of that creative spirit, I settle into my luxurious 2,500sqft villa and sip on calming rhododendron tea. Though I imagine John, Paul, George, and Ringo must have had other substances that helped them dream up those melodies.

I reach my own dream state later that day as I drift into a quiet state of bliss under the able hands of my masseuse at Heavenly Spa™ by Westin. Offering a suite of relaxation and pampering solutions—from ayurvedic massages and Balinese treatments to luxury facials using products by Himalayan brand Jivisa—the spa team kneads out knots in tired bodies and minds to truly rejuvenate guests. Whether you're looking to recharge or relax, there is something for everyone here. I'm training for the Mumbai marathon when I visit and with the in-house Run Concierge, I discover picturesque trails just outside the property. Despite the early start, the chirping birds, crisp mountain air, and scenic route more than make up for it.

Post my run, I feast on a breakfast of champions at the outdoor section of Akasa, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant. I'm served fruits, smoothie bowls, and golden croissants, as well as dishes inspired by the region like puri-bhaji and thukpa. Later that day, I tuck into a Garhwali thali that stars local ingredients like stinging nettle leaves, fiddlehead ferns, and hisalu berries. Other F&B options include pan-Asian restaurant Toya's teppanyaki showcase as well as an à la carte menu with a range of impressive gin cocktails, sake, and spirits; poolside grill and barbeque restaurant Pebbles; and Haven Lounge for single malts and nibbles.

Apart from the food, there's much to keep you and your loved ones entertained. Lounge in the infinity pool while your tots entertain themselves at the Westin Family Kids Club. Those travelling with toddlers can book the interconnected family rooms. In the works are an amphitheatre and entertainment centre for teens. Thanks to the varied offerings, we imagine the property becoming a favourite for multigeneration family reunions and destination weddings.

Further afield, there is plenty to explore. The team can curate itineraries ranging from the Ganga aarti at Triveni Ghat, white-water rafting experiences, yoga on the river banks with the in-house yogini, guided treks with jaw-dropping views, and safaris at Rajaji National Park—the choices are as varied as your interests. All you have to do is ask and it will flow. Just like the river.

THE WESTIN RESORT & SPA, HIMALAYAS Khasra No. 605 Narendra Nagar, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. *(Doubles from ₹40,000. marriott.com)*

THE ORCHARD MANOR GOA

From decor to service, this private mansion in Anjuna is all about its stories, finds **Joanna Lobo**

I am in the heart of Goa's Anjuna in peak season and there is not one tourist (or anyone else) in sight. And that is true luxury in Goa today. This beautifully curated 12,000-sq ft, six-bedroom property is the pride of Ozzy Serrao, an ex-merchant navy captain. Originally conceptualised as his home, this is a labour of love that Serrao wanted to share with the world. Walk around the expansive light-filled space and you will find art, antiques, salvaged objects, books—all with a story attached to it—from all the places Serrao has been to, discovered and fallen in love with. The result is a mansion that blends Art-Deco with tropical modernism and oodles of personality.

Here, the indoors and outdoors segue together beautifully. The dining area, kitchen and bedrooms are wrapped around a high-ceilinged hall. A porch skirts the house, overlooking a garden with mango, banana, custard apple and cashew trees and a gorgeous pool. The two rooms on the ground floor have easy access to the garden and feature indoor and outdoor baths. A wooden staircase takes me to the three rooms upstairs with enclosed balconies and a shared verandah. Another flight of stairs leads to the penthouse, which has its own outdoor balcony. Budding ornithologists can spend time at the birding corner on the first floor which comes with binoculars and a book to help identify the species in the area.

At Orchard Manor, beauty lies in the little details that Serrao and his friend, designer Paul Rodrigues, have put together, making it a lovely, unexpected treasure hunt. There's an abundance of Burma teak cupboards, mahogany and rosewood benches, and Dutch colonial blanket chests. There are three libraries packed with collections of old books sourced from Europe. There's art everywhere, even in the bathrooms. I am particularly captivated by a dressed Raja Ravi Varma oleograph.

It is evident that this is the vision of a Bombay boy and there's much in the house that has its roots in the city. The Art Deco style finds its way into furniture, the verandah tiles, the outdoor gazebo, and the New York Ball bed in The Emerald Suite. In addition, the penthouse terrace will soon sport a bathtub sourced from an old demolished Parsi bungalow in Malabar Hill.

> "Here, beauty lies in the little details that Serrao and his friend, designer Paul Rodrigues, have put together, making it a lovely, unexpected treasure hunt"

Serrao has been a collector since his seafaring days: on the days when he went out to port, he would see something he liked and find a way to acquire it. Take for example, the sputnik lights in the house. These come from a nightclub on a decommissioned cruise liner in England that Serrao used to frequent as a student in 2001. He bought them at the first opportunity he got and these lights now form a major part of Orchard Manor's fixtures. My hands graze the ivory of the Blüthner grand piano in the hall, bought to India in 1874 by Irish nuns. There's a lamp that survived the attack at The Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai; Chinese Martaban stone jars that once transported pickles and now serve as plant pots; and a framed copy of the first floor plan of the Goa Medical College building picked up from a local raddiwala.

The house comes with two chefs who can rustle up anything you want with the freshest ingredients: the fish comes in daily from the market, vegetables are sourced from a nearby hydroponic farm and the kitchen has its own herb garden. My breakfast comes floating in the pool and includes salmon on toast and a fresh strawberry milkshake. The Goan meal has jumbo prawns balchao, chicken cafreal, red snapper with recheado masala, and mushroom xacuti.

There is a staff of 15 on hand to cater to every whim. Serrao himself handles the complimentary concierge service and helps create the itineraries, including the best seats at Goa's leading restaurants. Sundowners, swims, yoga sessions, massages and chefs' tasting tables apart, guests can also expect the unexpected. While I am there, Serrao brings in a tarot card reader and despite my initial scepticism, I am drawn right into her world. It is these stories and personalised touches that makes this much more than just another luxe Goan villa.

THE ORCHARD MANOR, Anjuna-Mapusa Road, Gaunvaddi, Anjuna, Goa. *(From ₹1.5 lakh for the entire villa. theorchardmanor)*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **THE PHOTOARCHITECTS**

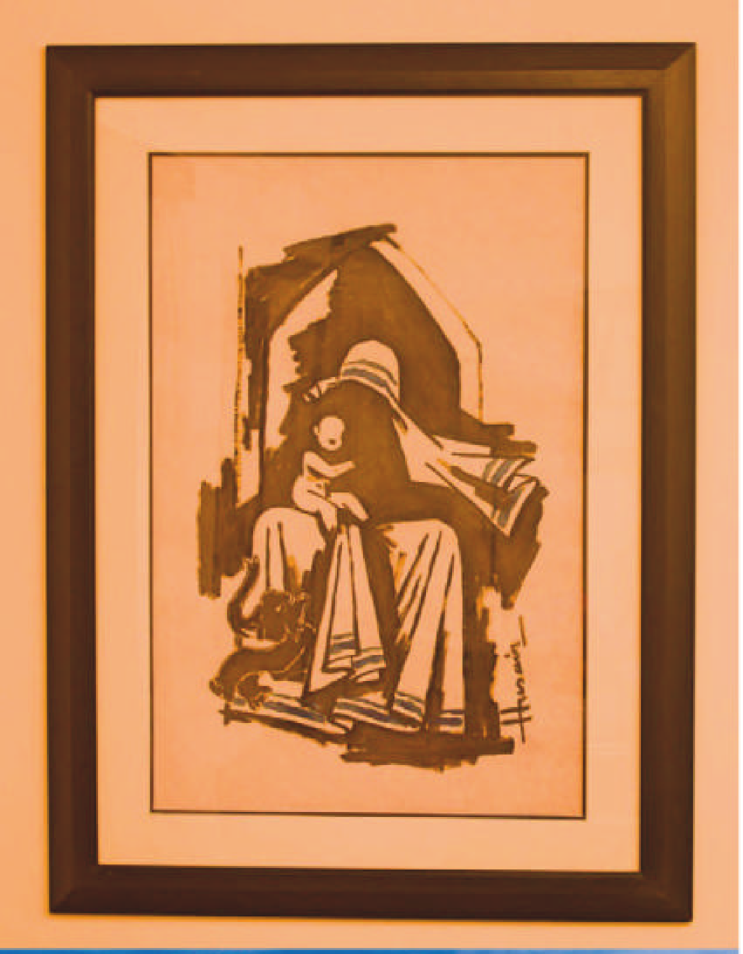
THE

NO DIVING
DEPTH 2 MTR

TO

KEY ART

Standout pieces of art to look out for at hotels in India and beyond. Compiled by **Arundhati Ail**



TILAR SIRO - CGH EARTH, HAVELOCK ISLAND

At this Andamans hotel, Kerala-based artist Rajeev Valsala Kumaran has upcycled metal scrap left over from its construction to create pieces inspired by the island's flora, fauna, and marine life. The pieces are scattered across the two-and-a-half-acre property, setting up a fun treasure hunt for guests. *cghearth.com*

SOUKYA, BENGALURU

The art that adorns Soukya's walls reflects its wellness philosophy. The theme emanates from founder Dr Issac Mathai's office, where an MF Husain painting of Mother Teresa—a silhouette of her in her signature white sari with a blue border, with an infant on her lap—points to the importance of care. *soukya.com*

THE KHYBER HIMALAYAN RESORT & SPA, GULMARG

Photographs displayed across the property spotlight the artisans of Kashmir and their dying craft. *Vanishing Hands*, the series by Kashmiri photographer Faheem Qadri, offers a glimpse into the world of pottery, pashmina embroidery, and intricate wicker weaving that these artists have mastered over generations. *khyberhotels.com*

TAJ THEOG RESORT & SPA, SHIMLA

Replicating the frosted cones that form on rooftops after snowfall, small wooden pieces deck up a wall of the lobby at the property. It is an homage to the delicate woodwork that has been part of Himachali architecture and can be seen in temples like the Hadimba Devi Temple, the palaces of Naggar, and the balconies of local homes. *tajhotels.com*

SKYVIEW BY EMPYREAN, PATNITOP

This one's for the motorheads. The 1971-72 model Willys Jeep parked on the property has been a star attraction for years. The US-imported car has been lovingly restored and is sure to keep automobile enthusiasts occupied. *skyviewbyempyrean.com*

ITC NARMADA, AHMEDABAD

Art is everywhere at ITC Narmada—right from the lobby, which is inspired by the design of the Adalaj stepwell. Turn your gaze up to the ceiling and you will be greeted by intricate gold mirror work inspired by lippan, the local mural craft of Kutch. Here, Gujarat's heritage blends seamlessly into contemporary design. *itchotels.com*

UMAID BHAWAN PALACE, JODHPUR

Murals and paintings of birds and wildlife of Marwar bring the walls of Umaid Bhawan Palace to life. A dip in the indoor pool is the right setting for you to soak in the vibrant blue murals by Polish artist Stefan Norblin that surround you. The palace is Norblin's biggest project where he has merged Art Deco with local mythology. *tajhotels.com*

RAH BAGH, SRINAGAR

The intricately carved Kashmiri samovar is typically used to brew and serve the region's popular noon chai and kahwa. At Wan Posh, the all-day restaurant at Rah Bagh, a handcrafted, specially commissioned copper samovar takes pride of place. Crafted by coppersmith Haji Gulam Mohammad, the samovar is a three-foot-tall and 30-kg piece of art to behold. *rahbagh.com*

ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS, NARENDRA NAGAR

In Hindu temples, the lighting of an oil lamp signals the start of something auspicious or transformative. Keeping with the theme, the spa at this property in Uttarakhand showcases an antique oil lamp from a temple in Kerala. The 200-year-old handcrafted copper lamp is believed to symbolise evolution of life. *anandaspa.com*

THE OBEROI, MUMBAI

A seven-foot bronze sculpture of a man and a woman dancing greets guests in the main lobby of The Oberoi in Mumbai. Sculpted by artist Dimpy Menon, the structure represents the joy of movement, and the grace and control it requires. The figures come across as playful and gentle, and look as though the sculptor had frozen a split second in the midst of their performance. *oberoihotels.com*

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON GOA

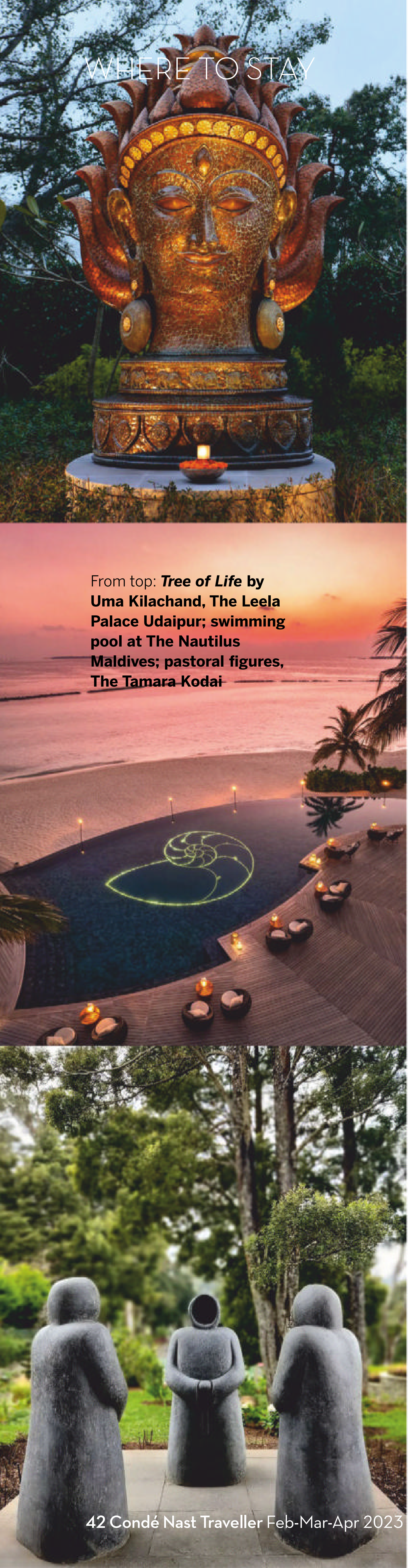
A statue of a violinist and a dog, sculpted by renowned Goan illustrator Mario Miranda, is an art piece that immediately catches your eye at DoubleTree by Hilton Goa. Gracing the lobby, the piece is an ode to Goa's rich culture and is designed to bring a smile to your face with its almost comical appearance. *hilton.com*

FAIRMONT JAIPUR

The long corridors of the Ruhab Spa at Fairmont Jaipur open to the property's stunning swimming pool. Inspired by the design of Chaupad, an old, royal cross and →

PHOTOGRAPH: **SIDDHI MEHTA**

Reception at ITC Narmada. Previous page, from top: **an MF Husain painting at Soukya; Kids Club, JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa; Mario Miranda sculpture at DoubleTree by Hilton Goa**; Opening pages: **Chaupad pool, Fairmont Jaipur**



From top: ***Tree of Life* by Uma Kilachand, The Leela Palace Udaipur; swimming pool at The Nautilus Maldives; pastoral figures, The Tamara Kodai**

circle game, the pool is shaped like the game's board. There are conversation pits on either side and a separate pool for kids. *fairmont.com*

CONRAD BENGALURU

When you check in at Conrad Bengaluru, you are welcomed by the "Thread of Life" artwork made by Indian artisans that acts as the perfect backdrop for the lobby. A fusion of colour and texture, the 3D wall installation is an ode to the treasured mulberry silk produced in the state. *hilton.com*

SAMODE SAFARI LODGE, BANDHAVGARH

Sinking into a warm bath in one of the property's 12 independent villas is even more gratifying as you'll be taking in the spectacular Gond mural on the wall. Created by renowned Gond artists Venkat Singh Shyam and Dileep, the pieces honour the many animals and birds that find a place in local Gond tradition. *samode.com*

RAFFLES UDAIPUR

Two black obelisks stand tall like formidable guards right at the entrance of Raffles Udaipur. The narrow, four-sided obelisks are inspired by Egyptian architecture historically found at the entrance of temples or important institutions. They were believed to signify immortality. *raffles.com*

PULLMAN NEW DELHI AEROCITY

At Pullman New Delhi Aerocity, design elements inspired by peacocks can be found in every corner. In the lobby, a resplendent chandelier curves along the ceiling, its crystals appearing almost like raindrops. The piece is meant to evoke the joy of the first rain and the grace of the peacock's beautiful dance. *pullmannewdelhi.com*

FINOLHU BAA ATOLL MALDIVES

To reflect the vibrant colours of the island, London-based design studio Muza Lab created a kaleidoscope installation at the entrance of the property. The two-metre lens, made with glass and metal, welcomes guests into the barefoot, playful resort. *finolhu.com*

CORA CORA MALDIVES

Drawing inspiration from the shore and the sea, Welsh sculptor Jon Foreman has two sculptures here made with coral, shells, and sand. They symbolise finding an escape at the property. *coracoraresorts*.com

JW MARRIOTT MALDIVES RESORT & SPA

The Kid's Club at this property is an exciting work of art in itself. FAMiLY by JW Little Griffin's Kids Club is inspired by a pirates' shipwreck on the beach. The architecture is a puzzle of beach huts, and the interiors are decorated with vibrant murals of sea creatures and flora. *marriott.com*

THE NAUTILUS MALDIVES

The main swimming pool at The Nautilus's Naiboli Bar features a theatrical light installation within an elaborately inlaid mosaic of a nautilus. As the sun sets, the animated lighting brings the nautilus to life, as it appears to rise through the water. *thenautilusmaldives.com*

HYATT REGENCY DHARAMSHALA RESORT

A 17-foot goddess Jayanti sculpture at the property highlights the history of devotion in Dharamshala. It is made of mirror-polished steel and reflects its surroundings at different angles. *hyatt.com*

THE TAMARA KODAI

Three stone pastoral figures on the hotel's porch commemorate Father Louis Saint Cyr, the priest of Kodaikanal's first church, and his two devout followers. A marker of local history, they have become a favourite spot for photos among guests. *thetamara.com*

THE ST. REGIS MUMBAI

The art collection at The St. Regis Mumbai comprises works of Indian maestros like SH Raza and MF Husain. The pièce de résistance is the Mumbai-themed mural at The St. Regis Bar by award-winning artist GR Iranna which captures the city's pulse—from the local taxi drivers to dabbawalas. *marriott.com*

HYATT REGENCY DEHRADUN

The eggshell artwork near the property's reception is an abstract representation of the Robber's Cave of Dehradun. The globes are undulated like the walkways of the cave, with their golden inner part representing the natural light making its way in. *hyatt.com*

THE LEELA PALACE UDAIPUR

The artworks here are inspired by the magic and grandeur of Rajasthan and its royal past. The lobby has a painting of deity Shrinathji with colours like peacock green, yellows, blues, and golds with exquisite pichhwai-style embellishments. *theleela.com*

PHOTO: BIKRAMJIT BOSE/VOGUE INDIA

VOGUE INDIA

BEFORE IT'S IN FASHION, IT'S IN VOGUE!

ROUND THE WORLD

India's beloved street food staple is moving beyond borders, inspiring international chefs to experiment with the dish in unique, unexpected ways, finds **Smitha Menon**

At the international food congress, Gastronomika—which brings the greatest culinary minds from around the world to Spain's San Sebastián—chef Lucía Freitas demonstrates a dish from A Tafona, her restaurant in Santiago. The creation is a tribute to the fisherwomen of Galicia, who harvest fresh barnacles from icy cold waters every morning. I watch as caramelised onion paste, liquid corn foam and barnacles are neatly piled into a crisply fried—gasp—puri. The puri she explains, "provides the right amount of crispiness to the dish while merging a traditional Galician preparation with vanguard fusion cuisine". Tasters are passed around the audience, who savour the dish as Freitas bows to thunderous applause.

So how did the beloved street food staple from India—the origins of which are mostly lost to history—reach the mecca of gastronomy in Spain? Slowly but surely, Indian cuisine is being demystified across the globe. As desi chefs like Chai Pani's Meherwan Irani in Asheville and Naved Nasir at London's Dishoom run award-winning outfits and Indian cookbooks like *Cooking To Save Your Life (*Juggernaut Books) by Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee grow in popularity, the soft power of the country's cuisine is growing. No longer are international chefs looking to India and thinking butter chicken. They're studying flavour profiles and age-old processes of the Indian kitchen. And this is where the pani puri comes in.

"Fine dining is all about delivering multiple tastes and sensations to a diner, in one simple bite. That's what pani puri does," says chef Himanshu Saini, who runs the Michelin-starred Trèsind Studio in Dubai and Trèsind in Mumbai. On Saini's menu, the dish is filled with organic arugula, potato and served with sweet and spicy water, a hat tip to chef Manish Mehrotra, who was arguably the first Indian chef to bring the dish to a fine dining setting. When I catch up with Freitas to quiz her about the creation, she explains that she first tried pani puri at a small stall in Mumbai, years ago. "My reaction was one of astonishment—I felt the explosion of flavours and spices. Multiple ingredients can be combined in this edible container. It's a work of creativity." In Madrid, Dabiz Muñoz—crowned the best chef in the world at the Best Chef Awards 2022—offers diners his take on the pani puri at DiverXO, his three-star Michelin restaurant. Here, diners encounter the dish filled with lobster claw and salmorejo, a traditional Andalusian soup of tomato, bread, extra virgin olive oil and garlic. Over the years, Muñoz has been inspired to create everything from a 'Mumbai hot dog' with puris atop a chunky sausage to one enveloped in a casing of jamón ibérico.

Up north in Copenhagen, at two-Michelin-starred Alchemist, one of the 50 courses offered over a six-

Clockwise, from left: **pani puri with foie gras from Moonrise, Dubai; chef Rasmus Munk; interiors and chef Dabiz Muñoz of DiverXO; pani puri dish and interiors at Nimb; chef Lucía Freitas.** Previous pages, from left: **interiors and pani puri at Trèsind Mumbai**

> "Fine dining is all about delivering multiple tastes and sensations to a diner, in one simple bite. That's what the pani puri does"

hour-long dining experience is the smoky ball, chef Rasmus Munk's take on the beloved Indian street food. Munk junks the idea of adding ingredients inside the puri by filling the fried ball with flavoured smoke. A short 15-minute drive away from Alchemist is Nimb, a design-forward boutique hotel where pani puri takes on Scandinavian flavours. Crab mousse, herbs and lumpfish roe are served with "crisp cushions of pani puri" at Nimb Brasserie, the hotel's French restaurant. Chef Samat Wibunnattiphong explains the creation: "It is very common in Denmark to eat blinis with lumpfish roe, but I always found it to be soft on soft. I wanted to make something crispy and light. One day, one of our Indian chefs introduced me to pani puri, and I fell in love. It is such a versatile treat to work with and is truly a chef's dream."

As much as it is an exotic item in Copenhagen, for chef Solemann Haddad of omakase restaurant Moonrise in Dubai, pani puri is "a piece of Dubai's culinary puzzle". Having grown up in the Emirate, Haddad was familiar with Indian flavours and used his childhood memories to create a dish of foie gras, a date-fennel syrup and a crispy puri. Haddad tells me this signature dish has been called his 'business card' by regular diners.

For Thitid "Ton" Tassanakajohn, the chef-entrepreneur behind Bangkok's Michelin-starred Le Du, Nusara, Mayrai and Baan, pani puri is a standout dish for Indian cuisine. And yet, it is a dish that can very easily travel to other cultures. "If you study the concept behind pani puri, it is so incredibly unique and smart," he says. For a popup in New Delhi, chef Ton created the Pani Puri Poh Taek that combined a cold traditional Thai soup of lamb jus, tomato, kafir, galangal, lemongrass and chillies with the crunch of a housemade puri.

While these interpretations of the dish are exciting, they do raise the question of cultural appropriation. How much is too much? Chef Ton provides a refreshing perspective. "I find it so absurd to think of cuisine as static and unchanging. Thai food is a combination of multiple exchanges of culture and trade. As is the case for any cuisine around the world. So if you think about it, there is no such thing as 'traditional, authentic cuisine' anywhere. It's constantly evolving. Who knows, if chef Muñoz is doing pani puri in Spain currently, 100 years from now, people might just be calling it Spanish cuisine," he says. It's only a matter of time until our love for pani puri travels around the world.

TEA TIME IN **SINGAPORE**

A new generation of curators is infusing fresh life into Singapore's tea culture, finds **Shamilee Vellu**

Something's brewing in Singapore—it's fresh, young and full of flavour. While traditional tea houses continue to serve those who enjoy their tea as an act of leisure, the island nation is now also home to a new breed of curators, teaware makers and unstuffy, modern tea ateliers that welcome both sophisticated sippers and neophytes alike.

"When I first started in 2014, the tea scene [in Singapore] was stagnant and hadn't changed much since the 1990s," says Kenny Leong who curates a range of tea experiences and runs the website teatle-tattle.com. In the seven years since, he has seen the emergence of new tea establishments, many run by people in their 30s or younger. This has given him hope that tea might take off just like third-wave coffee did. "We could have bars and shops offering really high-quality, artisanal, hand-brewed teas, and maybe even micro-batches of tea roasted by the brand's in-house experts. That would truly be exciting," says Leong.

There is definitely change afoot and here's how to savour the best of this emerging culture on your next trip to the Little Red Dot.

TEA TASTING

Run by a pair of millennials, SILK Tea Bar is a hidden, minimal space in a Chinatown shophouse that offers "contemporary tea experiences" without the stiff formality of traditional tea brewing rituals. Its streamlined menu focuses on single-origin Chinese varietals and progressive brews (where the flavour of tea evolves with consecutive steeps). A recent "tasting night" offered guests a chance to go beyond Tieguanyin, the most sought-after variety from China's Anxi County and explore seven other oolong teas from this region.

Antea Social in hipster cafe-heavy Tyrwhitt Road offers fine teas from Australia to Japan, each curated by a Taiwanese tea master and poured into a dainty teacup of your choice. Its highly giftable signature peach, mango and lychee oolong teas are indirectly infused with natural fruit essential oils using a special process. Both aficionados and society ladies can be found at Tea Bone Zen Mind's tranquil tea studio in heritage

From left: **Kenny Leong conducts tea-centred mindfulness sessions and educational workshops; old shophouses in Chinatown are home to new-age tea cafes in the city; a selection of teas at Antea Social.** Opposite page: **a setup by tea practitioner Kenny Leong**

Emerald Hill neighbourhood savouring high-quality Chinese, Japanese and English teas, all served in artisanal teaware. Founded by renowned tea authority Carrie Chen over 20 years ago, it is the undisputed "OG" behind Singapore's tea renaissance.

At Esplanade Mall, Fort Sanctuary stage-manages every aspect of its ultra-prestigious Wuyi rock-essence tea. The leaves are harvested from its own plot in Wuyishan in China's Fujian province and then transported to a custom facility in Singapore. Here, the precious leaves are "fired" and rested using proprietary techniques to fully express their texture, vibrancy and finish.

On Mohamed Sultan Road, modern Japanese kappo-style restaurant Esora's dedicated tea specialist Kate Pascual curates a seasonal tea-pairing menu, with current "winter" offerings including eight refined teas such as a shiso and kabosu-zest-infused Okumidori green tea and the light and fruity Oriental Beauty, an exquisite "palate-opening" Taiwanese oolong.

Fine-diner restaurant Born located in Neil Road's historic Jinrikisha Station, offers one of Singapore's most creative non-alcoholic beverage menus, comprising in-house ferments, juices and teas from China, Korea and Taiwan. Prepared tableside, the teas pair perfectly with Chef Zor Tan's nine-course menus which are a culinary fusion of French and Chinese techniques and flavours. Do not miss the aromatic Milk Oolong (processed over milk-water steam) and the vegetal, umami Woojeon green tea from Jeju island.

PHOTOGRAPH: **CHRIS SCHALKX**

TEA ATELIERS

Set in an industrial estate, Eagle Tea Merchant is a hidden gem that offers superb-quality pu'er and yanchas, by appointment. "My customers and I are less interested in tea tradition than we are in enjoying tea as a high-end beverage," says owner Alex Lim, who sources the leaves he retails from China personally. Pre-pandemic, Lim travelled to Yunnan's mountains for at least three months every spring to source his fermented tea or pu'er, and employs a traditionally high roast for his yanchas, which lends them considerable ageing potential and "brings out a sweet caramelised minerality that lingers for a really long time".

> "The precious leaves of the Wuyi rock-essence tea are 'fired' and rested to fully express their texture, vibrancy and finish"

Online retailer Pekoe & Imp focuses on unblended, unflavoured single-origin teas, with unique offerings including Awa Bancha, a delicately fruity but obscure Japanese tea, which is covered with banana leaves to ferment with lactic acid for up to four weeks, and single-origin tea-infused Tea Chocolate, a special collaboration with local chocolatier Fossa Chocolate. Also try their Da Yu Ling High Mountain oolong tea, which features a buttery smoothness, light floral fragrance and sweet corn notes.

Specialty tea company, A.muse Projects allows customers to design their own blends and offers a wide range of tea-themed accessories, soaps and candles.

Teaware making has become popular in Singapore thanks to pandemic hobbyists, but more established artists in the field include Kim Whye Kee, an ex-convict turned highly sought-after ceramicist. His elemental and elegant teaware includes traditional Chinese brewing vessels as well as tea caddies, tea bowls and tea boats, all of which will soon be available online. Alvin Ng is another teaware maker whose products are functional pieces of art. His unique "hand pinching" method creates a beautiful interplay between clay and wood-ash glazes.

TEA EXPERIENCES

Kenny Leong offers tea-centred events and education, including everything from a quirky pop-up tea bar at Singapore's Asian Civilisations Museum to period-authentic reconstructions of tea preparations during the Song and Qing Dynasty using textual and archaeological evidence, as well as historically authentic teaware. In keeping with the current wellness zeitgeist, Leong also offers guided, tea-centred mindfulness sessions, in which participants find stillness and clarity while sipping tea and contemplating the works of famed Chinese philosophers such as Laozi and Zhuangzi.

Queen Mary 2

WHY WE TRAVEL

VOYAGE OF THE MIND

Noo Saro-Wiwa trails literature's great figures on board the *Queen Mary 2* from London to New York

I'm standing on a balcony of the *Queen Mary 2* cruise liner as it departs Southampton for a seven-day journey across the Atlantic, its movement so gentle as to be almost imperceptible. Oscar Wilde, who made the same voyage in 1882, described the experience as "uninteresting", the ocean having no "roar". But, far from obscuring such disparaging thoughts, Cunard displays Wilde's words on the *QM2*'s upper deck as a testament to its long connection to the world of letters. Since Victorian times, the 182-year-old shipping line has embraced its status as the preferred means for creative figures to travel between Europe and America.

Though some, like Mark Twain, praised the passage, Charles Dickens was harder to please. Sailing from Liverpool to Boston on *The Britannia*, Cunard's earliest transatlantic ship, he described his stateroom as "a profoundly preposterous box". But, 22 years later, in 1864, he changed his tune, reporting that his trip on RMS *Cuba* was far more salubrious.

In 1874, Cunard was the first liner to launch a library on the ocean. Each year, during its Literature Festival at Sea, top authors are invited. In 2022, passengers enjoyed panels with British novelists Ian Rankin, Maggie O'Farrell, and 2019 Booker Prize winner Bernardine Evaristo.

My time onboard doesn't coincide with the literature festival but is still packed with events. I wander the liner's 13 passenger decks, stumbling upon a dining room where passengers learn how to paint with watercolours; elsewhere, the Royal Shakespeare Company is running a playwriting workshop. There are lectures on esoteric topics ranging from investing in art to the world of TV news anchoring. I particularly enjoy a retired police officer giving the lowdown on drug mules who swallow their contraband.

> "Wes Anderson, who prefers travelling by ship due to his fear of flying, spent his afternoons in the library, working on a new screenplay"

On some days, the ocean does roar. Land becomes a distant memory. The loudspeaker broadcasts announcements from the captain. At one point, he informs us that the nearest terra firma is the Azores, 700 nautical miles to the south. His daily communiqués are accompanied by nautical nuggets. We learn about the "Great Circle", a calculation used to navigate between two points on the Earth's surface.

Passengers find themselves chatting to famous folks during signings in the book shop—or even getting down with them on the dance floor after dinner. In 2014, Wes Anderson brought Tilda Swinton, Jason Schwartzman, and Roman Coppola on board for discussions and screenings of *The Grand Budapest Hotel.* Anderson, who prefers travelling by ship due to his fear of flying, spent his afternoons in the library, working on a new screenplay.

My fellow passengers are an intriguing bunch. I sip afternoon cocktails with a retired engineer, a former White House Cabinet member, and a beadwork artist fulfilling his childhood dream of travelling by ocean liner. One afternoon, I stroll around the library. Just beyond a row of mahogany shelves, a woman leafs through a book, her profile backlit and framed by the window. It's easy to appreciate how the ocean's mesmeric waves might inspire creativity. In his 1891 novella *The Patagonia*, Henry James described the ocean as "darkly and magnificently blue and imperturbably quiet, save for the great regular swell of its heartbeats, the pulse of its life". The author had sailed on Cunard some years earlier.

On the final day, as the liner glides past the Statue of Liberty beneath New York's fiery orange and purple skies, I stand on deck and think again about Wilde, who, upon his arrival in the Big Apple, allegedly said, "I have nothing to declare but my genius". After my immersion in this dense pocket of sophistication, I understand where he was coming from.

Seven-day sailing aboard Cunard's Queen Mary 2 from £1,885 (₹ 1,87,984) per person; cunard.com

THE BEST BEACH CLUBS IN **DUBAI**

From boho-chic to Champagne-fuelled parties, Dubai's beach club scene is unrivalled

Whatever sun seekers are looking for, Dubai's beach clubs have got it all—from the style and glamour of the French Riviera with exclusive private beaches, Champagne and caviar to high-octane parties reminiscent of Bali or Ibiza and the whitewashed elegance of seaside spots in Miami or Mykonos.

SOUL BEACH DUBAI

Set in the manicured grounds of Jebel Ali's JA The Resort, Soul Beach Dubai has a private white sand beach and sprawls over 3,000sqft. It is eminently Instagrammable with pop-coloured umbrellas and an infinity pool overlooking the azure waters beyond. There is an indoor and outdoor restaurant and lounge—Aperol Lounge and Estrella Beach Bar—and a huge rooftop space for events. Multiple lounging areas—from beanbag seating to sunbeds—are also available. After dark, the venue transforms into a destination reminiscent of Ibiza party hotspots with live DJs. *soulbeachdxb.com*

TWIGGY BY LA CANTINE

On the serene shores of the Park Hyatt Dubai, Twiggy by La Cantine is a sun-dappled spot split between an al fresco restaurant terrace serving delectable Mediterranean-inspired dishes and a beach club, where plush loungers and luxury cabanas line the ivory sands that lead to a 100-metre infinity pool of crystal-clear water. There is a glass-lined wooden terrace, complete with perfectly landscaped greenery, and each table promises uninterrupted views across Dubai Creek. It leads to The Lagoons, where chic cabanas and loungers welcome guests to enjoy lively afternoons by the poolside. *twiggy.ae*

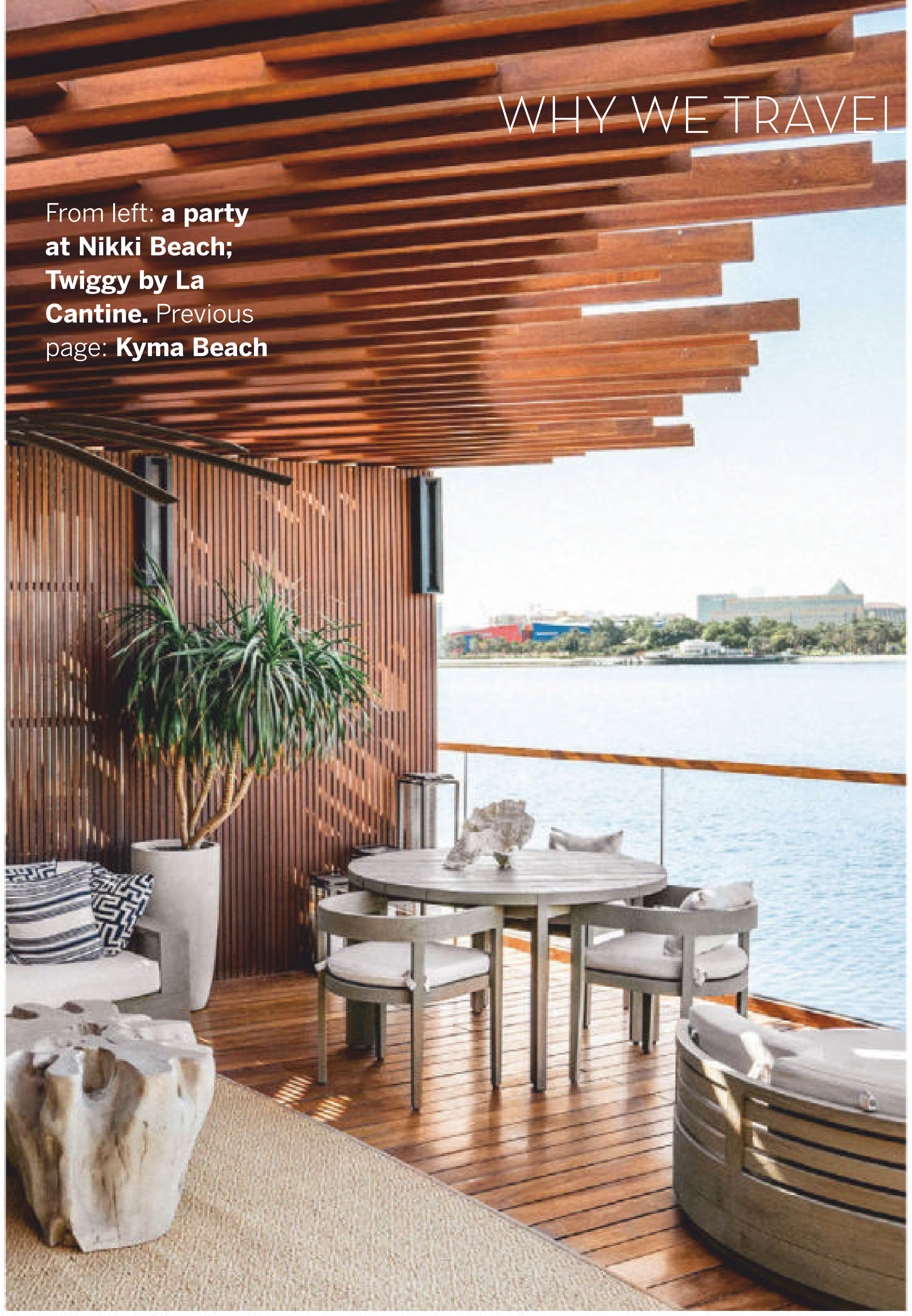
NIKKI BEACH

Nikki Beach has become a global icon in the day clubbing scene, with beach clubs around the world in hedonistic locations like Ibiza, Marbella, Miami, Barbados, and Saint-Tropez. Its Dubai location is as spectacular as you'd expect, with a super-sized swimming pool taking centre stage complete with a ramp running through and a bar surrounding a raised DJ booth. In-water loungers, day beds, and cabanas—all in pristine white—are lined with Nikki Beach's signature orange towels around the pool. For those looking for an ultra VIP experience, there's even a day use of signature villas that come with their own private jacuzzis and overlook the festivities on the beach club. Ladies' days, weekend brunches, and regular themed events make this one of Dubai's most popular hotspots for day-to-night celebrations. *nikkibeach.com*

NAMMOS

On a private stretch of sand at the Four Seasons at Jumeirah beach, Nammos brings a slice of Mykonos to Dubai's stylish shores. In addition to the indoor and al fresco tables on the terrace serving fresh seafood with a fine Mediterranean fare, guests can also book one of the wooden loungers under the shade of Nammos' signature turquoise striped parasols and bask in the chic surroundings while soaking up the sun. *nammos.com*

TEXT: **ISABELLA SULLIVAN**



From left: **a party at Nikki Beach; Twiggy by La Cantine.** Previous page: **Kyma Beach**

COVE BEACH

Despite a change of location to Caesars Palace, Cove Beach has consistently been recognised as one of Dubai's best beach clubs. There are reasons aplenty—multiple swimming pools to dip into, elegant cabanas that come with private jacuzzis, a beautiful golden beachfront with hammocks and not one but two dining options—a restaurant and a rosé lounge. It's breezy and contemporary space with a Mediterranean feel that wouldn't look out of place on the European party islands, with a soundtrack to match on weekends and their ever-popular ladies' day on Wednesdays. Stay until the evening so you can watch the sun set behind the Burj Al Arab with a glass of bubbly then head to the restaurant to graze through an inspired Mediterranean and Japanese menu at the Two.0 restaurant. *covebeach.com*

DRIFT BEACH CLUB AT ONE&ONLY ROYAL MIRAGE, DUBAI

Adjacent to classic favourite One&Only Royal Mirage is Dubai's most photogenic beach club—DRIFT. Designed to transport guests to the elegant shores of the French Riviera, this private beach club is set on a kilometre-long private beach. There are shaded day beds, loungers at the poolside, and sunbathing spots on the golden beachfront. Guests are spoilt for choice with the fresh ingredient-driven Provençal menu and a range of innovative cocktails, wines and summer spritzes. *driftbeachdubai.com*

BEACH BY FIVE

Beach by FIVE is a seaside escape on Palm Jumeirah tailored for the glam set. There are double-width loungers, jacuzzis and cabanas as well as an expansive dining deck. The jewel in the crown of this beach club is a glass-lined pool topped with a twinkling chandelier—this is Dubai after all. Spend the day dipping between the calm waters of the Arabian Gulf and the pool, then head to the al fresco restaurant for European tapas with burratinas, sea bass carpaccio, and crispy calamari served alongside classic cocktails. *fivehotelsandresorts.com*

KYMA BEACH

A new kid on Dubai's Palm West Beach, KYMA is a Greek-style restaurant and club evoking sunny days in Mykonos and Santorini. The decor is chic with macrame parasols, driftwood furniture and a proliferation of white and elegant neutrals. Swim, sunbathe and keep plenty of time at hand to indulge in their carefully curated modern Greek menu. Expect a reinterpretation of classics with dishes like taramosalata, truffled seabream, cheese saganaki, feta loukoumi, moussaka and delicious desserts which include loukoumades and Greek yoghurt ice-cream. The cocktail list is also in keeping with the theme and channels summer in Greece with a mix of traditional spirits and exotic flavours. *kymabeach.ae*

BLA BLA

This super-sized all-day entertainment space is one of the stars of Dubai's party scene. Bla Bla on the JBR beachfront comprises 21 bars, a restaurant serving Japanese, Italian, and Texas Smokehouse food and a beach club where the party never ends. This is the spot for sun-soaked days heaped with Ibiza-vibes. A regular programme of live entertainment and uninterrupted views out to the sparkling waters and Ain Dubai will keep you here from breakfast till the wee hours. Swim, lounge in the cabanas by the poolside, snack on sushi, salads and wash it all down with the bar's delicious fruit-laden tropical cocktails. *blabladubai.ae*

SEEDS OF CHANGE

The simple act of eating together cuts through cultural barriers, says **Yasmin Khan**

The midday sun blazed down on the red Mediterranean soil. I took refuge under an olive tree and poured a cup of cardamom-laced coffee. As I sipped, I watched farmers harvest their olive crop, stripping the fruits, and tossing them into straw bags. The patter of falling olives was an ambient backdrop.

When the sun reached its highest point, they broke for lunch and invited me to join them. Freshly pressed extra-virgin olive oil, peppery and pungent, was poured into small bowls as a dip for our chewy flatbreads. Sweet juicy tomatoes were set next to squares of briny sheep's cheese, which we ate with pastries filled with wilted greens and sumac. It was a Mediterranean idyll but we were a long way from Puglia or the gorges of Crete. We were in Burqin, a village in the north of the West Bank, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

I had come here to research a book that celebrates a side of Palestine that never makes headlines—its dazzling cuisine. For many, the word "Palestine" conjures images of sieges, bullets, and hurled rocks. Exploring a food culture and seeking the best places to eat and drink might strike some as irrelevant at best, disrespectful at worst. When Palestinians are literally fighting for their lives, is it really appropriate for a travel writer to wax lyrical about the virtues of their hummus? I believe it is.

Food is a neutral way to connect people with places that may seem alien. Breaking bread is one of the oldest forms of human connection; sharing a meal with someone from an unfamiliar culture builds bonds in ways few other things can. It can help us see harsh situations through a new lens—dismantling political and cultural stereotypes and encouraging us to ask questions of the places we visit and people we meet.

I was born in the UK, but my mother comes from the shores of the Caspian Sea in northern Iran. I have often faced curiosity about my origins, acutely aware of the gulf between the country I know and love, and the one on the news with its hardline ayatollahs and angry mobs. As years passed, this gulf became a chasm and my frequent trips were met with raised eyebrows. How could an independent Western woman take pleasure in visiting a country so fraught with turbulence, people asked. My answer was simple: I loved the exuberance, affection and warmth of the Iranian people; I loved the scenery, from dramatic moonscapes to forested mountains; and most of all, I loved the abundant pomegranates and quinces, the succulent grilled meats, and the garlic- and herb-infused stews that harmonise sweet and sour flavours.

> "I saw Palestinians as so much more than simply victims of conflict. In the food culture of a supposedly dying region, I found so much life"

This gap in perceptions motivated me to write my first book, *The Saffron Tales*. I immersed myself in Iran's majestic rice paddies and tea plantations, swam in the waters of the Persian Gulf, and learnt about the food traditions of holidays like Nowruz. I lost myself in the magic of its rosewater festival where, each year, thousands travel to witness golab-giri, the process that transforms roses into rosewater with whole villages engulfed in damask roses' scent. I weaved together stories of grating carrots and crushing pistachios; harvesting saffron at dawn; or grilling fish with herbs and the juice of bitter oranges. By sharing the stories behind the food that Iranians ate, I opened a window into their lives.

Back in Palestine, I continued my culinary adventures. I hand-rolled maftoul—a type of large, plump couscous—with women who had formed an agricultural co-operative; shared mezze with groups of tattooed design students; learned to make mansaf, a celebratory rice and lamb dish, with human rights defenders; and I even found time for a pint with the producers of Taybeh beer, the Middle East's first craft brewery, run by a female master brewer.

Like outsiders unfamiliar with Iran, my food experiences in Palestine changed my perceptions and I saw Palestinians as so much more than simply victims of conflict. I came to admire the strength, resilience, humour, and charm; came to see them as generous, gregarious, quick to laugh, and to invite me to their weddings. In the food culture of a supposedly dying region, I found so much life.

My experience has taught me that learning about a country's food culture isn't just learning about ingredients. We get an insider view of its history, economy, agriculture, climate, trade, gender relations—often its soul. When people share food, they share themselves—a connection that feels important today. By doing so, we see that humans, whatever our background and wherever we come from, have more in common than what divides us. This is best summed up by the old Jewish adage "an enemy is just a person whose story you haven't heard yet". In my mind, there is no better place to share stories than at the dining table.

Yasmin Khan is a writer, broadcaster and the author of award-winning travel cookbooks The Saffron Tales, Ripe Figs*, and* Zaitoun.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARIE ZUCKER

Clockwise from top left: **woman in battoulah, Tehran; two views of Garmeh in Isfahan, Iran; pomegranate and rose petals**

BAR DU MOULIN
BOULANGERIE PATISSERIE

SHOP & STYLE

MAISON DE LA LITERIE

LIBRAIRIE
ARTAZART
GALERIE

SHOPPING IN PARIS

In the city that invented good taste, local creatives are updating French craft and style for a new generation by mixing influences from home and abroad.

By **Rooksana Hossenally**

Photographs by **Joann Pai**

self service
Ofr. Paris

STATEMENT STYLE

Blurring the lines between genders, and formal and casual wear, Alexandre Mattiussi's label, **Ami,** captures today's less contrived chic. Best known for its knitted jumpers with bright De Coeur logo, Ami first launched with a men's collection, followed by a "menswear for women" line. At his SS23 show, pieces were sharp and urban with a 1960s twist that plays with traditional tailoring and more sensual lines, including genderless oversized coats and colour-block silhouettes. Perfect for wearing underneath all that are cheeky knickers by **Henriette H**, whose founder, actor turned designer Sarah Stagliano, stamps her signature frilly white undies with spicy words like "Wet", "Milf" or a simple "Oui". *amiparis.com; henrietteh.com*

FURNITURE FIX

The Saint-Ouen flea market is the city's mainstay for furniture hunting, but it's also worth checking out interior designer Sarah Lavoine's handful of showrooms, including one in an old glass-roofed atelier in the 16th arrondissement. She launched her design studio, **Maison Sarah Lavoine**, in 2012 and her signature take on mid-century design woven with cosy fabrics and cheerful colours (including her own shade, Bleu Sarah) is intrinsic to her furniture, homeware, and clothing line. For more of a statement piece, **Galerie Kreo** is the go-to for clued-up designers and collectors. The gallery, which defines itself as a "research laboratory", was launched in 1999 by influential designers Clémence and Didier Krzentowski in the city and has an outpost in London. It has produced and featured limited-edition contemporary works, created exclusively for the gallery, by big-name designers like Virgil Abloh, and Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. It also curates a collection of 20th-century French and Italian lighting, one of co-founder Didier's many passions. *maisonsarahlavoine.com; galeriekreo.com*

DESIGN BOOKSHOPS

When Marie and Alexandre Thumerelle opened **OFR** (Open, Free and Ready) in the late 1990s, they were serving a Paris subculture crying out for a creative hub. Arty types come to this independent bookshop in the Marais to flick through highbrow fashion and art magazines. With an offshoot

Clockwise from top left: **shop window at OFR; design detail at Maison Sarah Lavoine; Amalthea interior; Abstraction founder Sébastien Plan; jewellery at Charlotte Chesnais; scent lab at Abstraction; bowls at Brutal Ceramics; personalised lingerie at Henriette H; founder of Henriette H, Sarah Stagliano (right); façade at Nose.** Previous pages, clockwise from top left: **display at Abstraction, Parisian street scene; Charlotte Chesnais in her shop; Place des Victoires; Artazart; interior of Nose; Brutal Ceramics founder Estelle Loiseau**

in the 10th arrondissement, as well as in the US and Asia, it also publishes its own titles, puts out capsule collections, makes films and has an event space. Another go-to for visual arts is **Artazart**, opened in 2000 by Carl Huguenin and Jérôme Fournel in a former shoe atelier previously overseen by a mistress of notorious French gangster Mesrine. The gallery-cum-library stocks photography and design books, international magazines and beautifully illustrated children's books. *ofrparis; artazart.com*

JEWELLERY AS ART

After nine years at Balenciaga, **Charlotte Chesnais** launched her eponymous collection of striking jewellery inspired by art, sculpture and anatomical drawings. The collection includes hoop earrings that appear to hover above the lobes, vermeil bracelets that spiral from the wrist to the palm, and four-finger rings. Lines are clean and classic, but unique in the way the pieces twist around parts of the body like gravity-defying artworks. *charlottechesnais.com*

HANDCRAFTED WARES

Estelle Loiseau, creator of Le Polyèdre travel blog, was inspired to set up **Brutal Ceramics** after a year in Japan. Loiseau loved the way that the Japanese create many different types of containers for serving food. On her return to Paris, the former architect opened her ceramic tableware boutique with products made by nature-focused artists who work with organic forms and materials. *brutalceramics.com*

CONSCIOUS BEAUTY

In 2018, after working for eight years in finance, Maryll Beaux launched **Amalthea**, an organic and eco-conscious skincare brand which designs routines and products across genders and skin types. The reusable packaging can be refilled at the company's boutique, where you can also book treatments for skin, body and mind. Another brand turning things around in the beauty industry is Juliette Levy's **Oh My Cream!** clean beauty concept store, which she set up in 2013, at the age of 25, as a place to bring together her favourite labels. Today, Levy has 22 stores in France and one in London, with a second due to open at the end of 2023. *amalthea.organic; ohmycream.com*

SCENTS AND THE CITY

MEET THE PERFUMERS OF PARIS

One of France's most celebrated olfactory creators, **Francis Kurkdjian** specializes in making bespoke scents. His maison's iconic perfumes include the rich, heady Oud Satin Mood with amber, sandalwood, and vanilla notes. *franciskurkdjian.com*

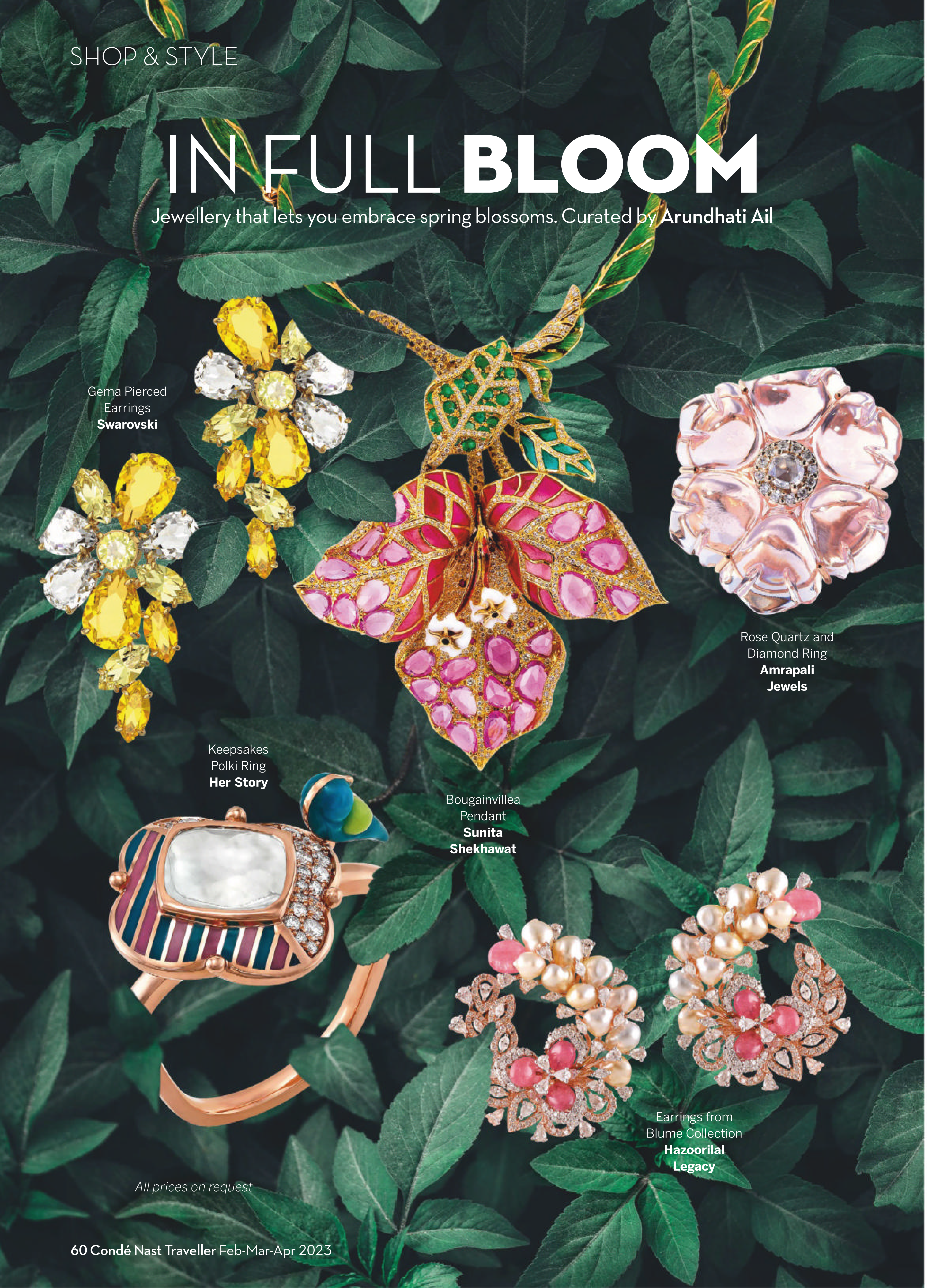
Another spot is perfume concept store **Nose** near the Marais. Experts will find the perfect scent for you from their 1,500 references, based on your olfactory diagnosis. *noseparis.com*

After 15 years in the fragrance industry, Sébastien Plan launched atelier **Abstraction** in Montmartre. He ages perfume like wine to get unique "vintages" with names such as Our Own Backyard and Accidental Maybe. *abstractionparis.com*

At **Ex Nihilo**, technology and perfumery combine to create disruptive artisan scents. Pick from existing fragrances like the alluring Santal Calling, or ask for your own version to be blended. *ex-nihilo-paris.com*

IN FULL **BLOOM**

Jewellery that lets you embrace spring blossoms. Curated by **Arundhati Ail**



Gema Pierced Earrings
Swarovski

Rose Quartz and Diamond Ring
Amrapali Jewels

Keepsakes Polki Ring
Her Story

Bougainvillea Pendant
Sunita Shekhawat

Earrings from Blume Collection
Hazoorilal Legacy

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PHOTOGRAPH: **UNSPLASH**

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POSTCARD FROM TOKYO

For **Sandra Choi,** creative director at Jimmy Choo, Japan's capital is a vivid source of inspiration. Here, she shares her favourite locations across the city

WHEN DID YOU FIRST VISIT TOKYO?

My role at Jimmy Choo took me to Tokyo and it was love at first sight. As a creative, the inspiration offered by the city is endless: a sensory overload in the most beautiful and welcoming way. I have memories of feeling as if I had entered a different universe, where a very traditional culture is fused with extreme modernity. Every facet of living is considered: I recall the ladies' bathroom having a seat for a baby. As a parent of young children at the time, this detail felt very personal to me. It's a city of contrasts, a bit like Jimmy Choo: multifaceted, the old with the new, the zen with the futurism; a city that's at once an extrovert and an introvert.

WHERE DO YOU STAY?

The Park Hyatt Tokyo is iconic. I think anyone who visits Tokyo identifies with the mood of *Lost in Translation*, which eloquently captures the emotions of being abroad on a business trip. A memory that remains clear for me, like a scene from a film, is a peaceful breakfast I had in my room, looking out at Mount Fuji—so serene and beautiful. On another trip, I stayed at the breathtaking Aman Tokyo. The sheer scale of the space, the height of the ceilings, and the trees growing within it all conveyed a very calming sort of luxury. You could hear yourself think for a moment and process the Tokyo experience outside. Next time, I am keen to stay at Hoshinoya Tokyo. Its concept is borrowed from Japanese ryokans—small family-run inns—spread across multiple floors with rooftop hot-spring baths.

WHERE DO YOU VISIT TO LEARN ABOUT THE CITY'S HERITAGE?

The Meiji Jingu, a Shinto shrine in Shibuya, is like a portal to a tranquil parallel universe as you step off one of the busiest intersections. It's tucked away in a forest between two of Tokyo's most industrial districts. Shrines are dotted all over the city. They're a great place to take in some of Tokyo's heritage and enjoy a moment of calm.

YOUR FAVOURITE PLACES TO EAT?

To beat jet lag, I tend to head to a robata grill restaurant on the first night, such as Robataya in the Roppongi district. I love the friendly environment and energetic way (in which) you are served with wooden paddles and presented with food straight from the barbecue with the traditional shout. The theatre of it means there's no need to make small talk, perfect when you are acclimatising to a new time zone. For sushi, I recommend the 12-seat Sushi M, an intimate experience and a twist on tradition, where sushi is paired with sake and wine. It's a partnership between Yoshinobu Kimura, one of Asia's best sommeliers, and skilled sushi chef Michimasa Nakamura.

PHOTOGRAPHS: **BILL PHELPS; SUSHI M TOKYO; ROBERTA VALERIO**
TEXT: **FLORRIE THOMAS**

> “Tokyo is a place that celebrates design in a very considered way and to the highest quality, which is always something that I want to emulate in my work”

FAVOURITE AREA TO STROLL AROUND?
Harajuku, where youth culture is thriving and teens are experimenting with fashion. The shopping and the sense of a generation on a journey to find its identity is so inspiring. They are using fashion as an expression of who they want to be and what tribe they want to belong to. It's also home to The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, which hosts cutting-edge temporary exhibitions.

BEST THING YOU'VE BOUGHT?
I love to go vintage shopping and Tokyo has some of the best stores anywhere. BerBerJin, in Shibuya, has the most coveted collection of vintage denim, branded apparel, and accessories dating back to the early 1900s. Denim features heavily in the Jimmy Choo spring collection. We recently did a capsule project with an organic indigo farm and dyeing house in Japan called Buaisou, which uses an incredibly slow, artful process. No trip is complete without a visit to Tokyu Hands, the city's best-known department store, to pick up irreverent bits and bobs. It's full of things that you never thought you needed but later wonder how you could ever do without: special sponges for polishing kettles, playful cutlery, and bento boxes for my girls, as well as an entire floor dedicated to pens. I can spend hours there.

A TRADITIONAL SNACK YOU SEEK OUT?
Eating authentic ramen on the street. Tokyo has the best in the world and ramen restaurants even appear in the Michelin guide. I also find Japanese supermarkets fascinating. I stock up on my favourite quirky snack—deliciously fishy dry-roasted squid—and flavoured miso soups for the flight home. Japanese writing is part Chinese, so it's a fun challenge for me to work out the ingredients of items on the shelves. I also bring home Japanese sweets from Mizuho in the Omotesando area. Made from bean paste, they are like edible art forms and the packaging is so beautiful.

24 HOURS IN TOKYO?
Don't sleep! You need to immerse yourself in everything this unique city has to offer—from the karaoke bars and sensory overload of Shibuya Crossing to moments of zen in the city's parks and temples.

HOW HAS TOKYO INSPIRED YOUR WORK AT JIMMY CHOO?
The contrast of the traditional with the modern and the sheer craft of the city. It's a place that celebrates design in a very considered way and to the highest quality, which is always something that I want to emulate in my work.

From far left: **Aman Tokyo; Jimmy Choo's creative director, Sandra Choi; swordfish, Japanese corn, and caviar at Sushi M; Ginza at night**

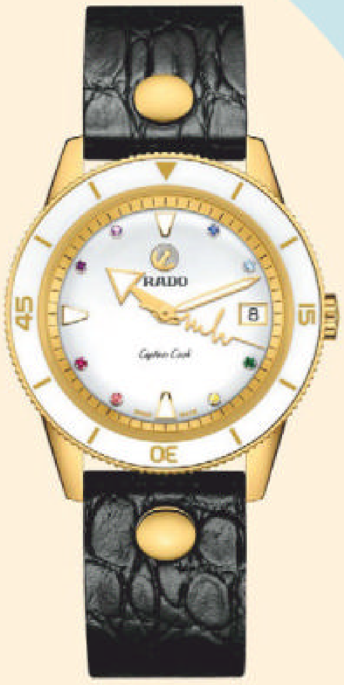
TIME FOR HER

The latest on luxury watches for women.
Curated by **Arundhati Ail.** Illustration by **Shruti Kembhavi**

Super Chronomat
Automatic 38
Origins
Breitling

Classique
Dame 8068
Breguet

Luminor Due
TuttoOro
Panerai


Captain Cook
x Marina
Hoermanseder
Heartbeat
Rado

Seiko
Grand Seiko

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Chopard

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THE BEST WATCHES OF 2019
FOOTBALL FOCUS RAHEEM STERLING
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THE AQUA ISSUE
MANIFESTO
"RAINWATER HARVESTING IS THE SOLUTION"
ACTOR OF THE YEAR
Ayushmann

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THE SUMMER FASHION ISSUE
VICKY KAUSHAL
SHAPE SHIFTER

PHOTOS: BIKRAMJIT BOSE (OCTOBER 2018); TARUN KHIWAL (SEPTEMBER 2018); R BURMAN (FEBRUARY 2019); PRASAD NAIK (AUGUST 2019); ERRIKOS ANDREOU (OCTOBER 2019); TARUN VISHWA (MARCH 2019); ALL COURTESY OF GQ INDIA

GQ
LOOK SHARP. LIVE SMART.

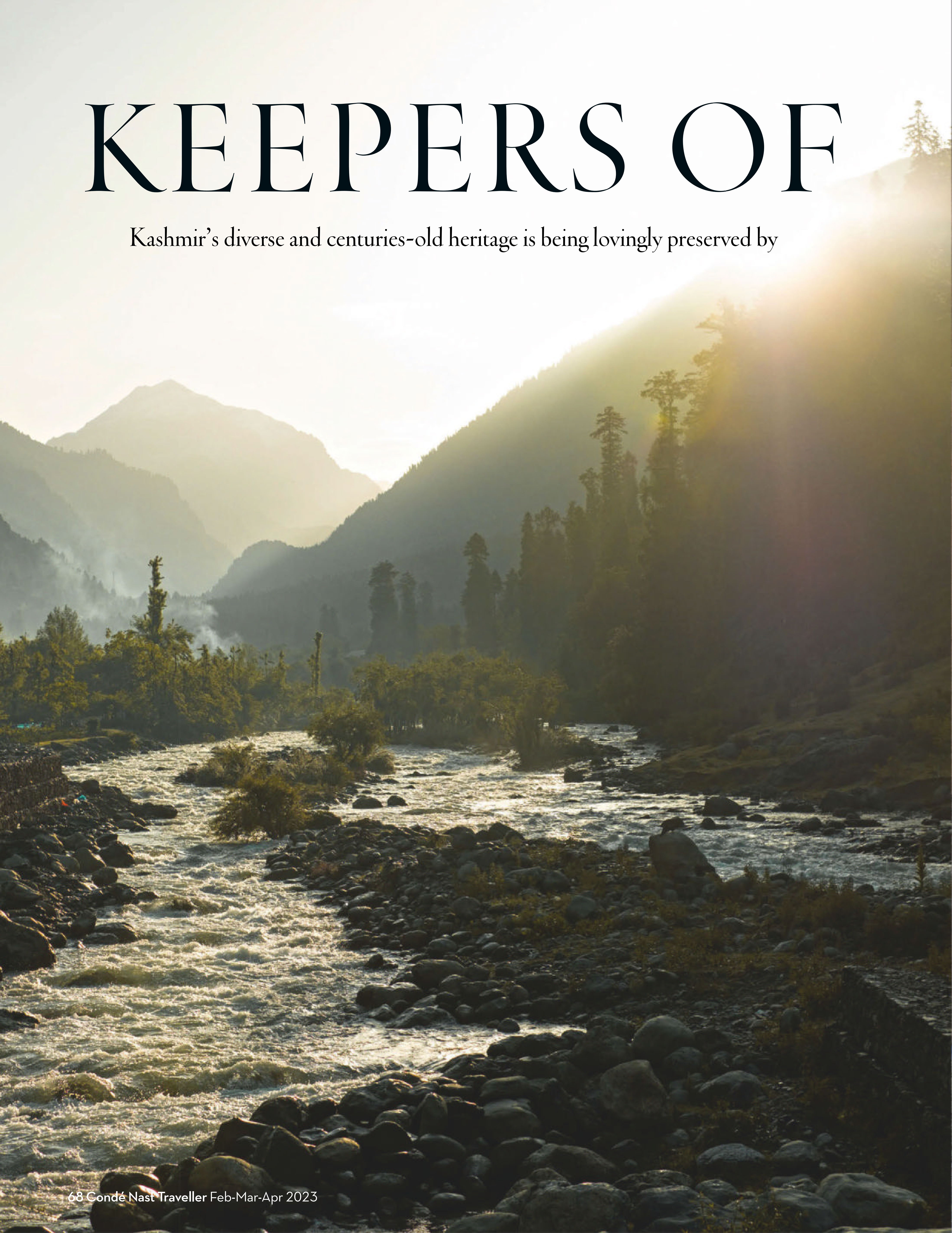
PHOTO: TARUN KHIWAL/*GQ* INDIA

FEATURES

A view of the pool at The Datai Langkawi, Malaysia. Photographed by **Chris Schalkx** for *The Gold List 2023* (p80)

KEEPERS OF

Kashmir's diverse and centuries-old heritage is being lovingly preserved by



THE VALE

its locals, finds Saumya Ancheri. Photographs by Himanshu Lakhwani

Flowers overflow across the Beigh workshop in Alamgari Bazar in Srinagar. Petals and stems entwine on the green handknotted Kashmiri carpet and encrust the sozni shawls draped on laps. Master weaver and national award-winner Mehboob Ali Beigh's ancestors were among the hundreds of craftsmen that the scholar and Sufi saint Shah-e-Hamdan brought here from Persia in the 14th century. Needles deftly fly on fingertips, drawing out centuries-old patterns inspired by the landscapes of Persia and Kashmir.

In Kashmir, time seems to move slower. A sozni shawl is two years in the making, shikara boats twirl across the Dal Lake with the meditative calm of whirling dervishes, everything from the deliciously milky vanilla softy from the ice-cream vendor to the Tata mini-buses and Maruti Suzukis on the road breathe of an older time.

The decades-long conflict has left no family untouched, and the piercing gaze of soldiers is a reminder of a fragile peace. There are new hotels and grand plans for development in the Valley. But what sings to me on our week-long road trip from Srinagar to the hill station of Pahalgam, the austere and massive mountainside stone temple complex of Naranag, the picturesque Yusmarg where Jesus apparently retired as a shepherd, and the golden meadow of Sonamarg, is the timeless grace of the ever-hospitable Kashmiris and the efforts to preserve their stupendous, vanishing heritage.

KARIGARS OF KASHMIR

Gulzar Hussain, our guide and the co-founder of Ladakh-based tour company Frozen Himalayas, tells us that if someone returns with an heirloom shawl made by the Beigh family, they will take out the yarns from that era that have aged similarly, to repair the work. Still, the intricacies of sozni embroidery are fading with the older generation as younger weavers find that the low financial returns are no match for the time and effort that it takes to excel in this demanding craft.

One piece was completed by Beigh when his brother who was working on the shawl, and then their father, passed away in the last couple of years, leaving him alone with the skill and knowhow to finish it. Another masterpiece, old but still a bright orange, is among the last of its kind, Mehboob's son Saqib says, as there is hardly anyone left who is able to do the extra-fine needlework required to stitch hundreds of flowers into a half-inch border. Gulzar explains, "Someone has sat weaving for 40 years to be able to make that shawl. It's a skill that takes years of patience; it is a meditation.

Above: **boatman on Dal Lake, Srinagar** Opposite page, clockwise from top left: **weavers work on sozni shawls; Mahmood Ahmad Shah; interiors of the Khanqah-e-Moula shrine.** Opening pages, from left: **Pahalgam's scenic surrounds have transfomed a once sleepy village into a bustling resort town; architect and artist Zoya Khan in Srinagar**

Sonamarg's alpine meadows and snow-capped mountains

"IN KASHMIR, TIME SEEMS TO MOVE SLOWER AND EVERYTHING

MOVES AND BREATHES WITH THE PACE OF AN OLDER WORLD"

> “IN KASHMIR, FOOD IS POETRY. IT’S ALSO WHERE YOU CAN TASTE HISTORY AND FORM CONNECTIONS WHEN SPEAKING IS DIFFICULT”

You’ll get work today by the usual karigar but this type of masterpiece has become very rare.” The carved wooden khatamband ceilings above us, and the sozni embroidery, pashmina shawls and handknotted carpet around us, are among the Kashmiri crafts that have been granted Geographical Indication tags.

“Shah-e-Hamdan is credited with introducing new crafts and improving upon existing crafts so Kashmiris look upon craft-making as a religious practice because it was given to them by the Sufi saints,” says Mahmood Ahmad Shah, the director of handloom and handicrafts and former tourism director, Kashmir. He was behind Srinagar’s successful entry in 2021 into UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network. The UNESCO inclusion has boosted the case for preserving these skills in the age of the last mastercraftsmen, enabling the director to set up craft tours for visitors (with the young guides trained by Gulzar) as well as workshops for the artisans and authentication measures for the products. One of the best places to see some of the Sufis’ artistic legacy is Srinagar’s Khanqah-e-Moula shrine to Shah-e-Hamdan, an exquisite jewel box of richly patterned papier-mâché naqashi murals and glowing khatamband ceilings. The shrine, first commisioned by Sultan Sikendar Shah in 1395, has been built, destroyed and rebuilt across centuries. We walk around to take in the gorgeous floral and paisley murals added by artists from different centuries.

“Nature has spiritual significance for all Kashmiris,” says architect and artist Zoya Khan, as we walk past the Khanqah-e-Moula to the ghats by the River Jhelum that splits Srinagar. “The houses were mostly constructed in the 19th century and are dotted with cantilevered dubs [balconies] where daily life unfolded.” We enter one of the traditional wooden houses to appreciate the romance of a zoon dub. “Zoon dubs were made for women to lie down and look up at the moon,” says Zoya, adding that the river ghats were called “yaarbals” in Kashmiri, “a meeting place for friends, and an important space for women to come together. The traditional dub is either enclosed by pinjrakari panels [latticed wooden screens with intricate geometric patterns] or coloured glass windows in the newer houses.” Inspired by the zoon dub, she has enclosed the small, open balcony of her bedroom with coloured glass and a deodar frame, and enjoys painting there as the sun filters in through the rosy glass panes. “It’s particularly fascinating to study the fenestrations of these vernacular houses as they responded to the socio-cultural context, say by ensuring privacy for the women of the house, while also contributing to a climate-responsive structure that can withstand earthquakes,” she says.

Zoya Khan works to revive the city’s heritage in many ways, including a spotlight on dying arts such as handmade glazed tiles, and making prints that juxtapose Kashmir’s traditional architecture with pop imagery—like Srinagar’s downtown area as the backdrop to Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra cavorting on a bike in a song from the movie *Sholay*. Her collages are popular for the sense of fun they bring in, encouraging viewers to engage in fresh ways with their heritage.

SUSTAINING THE VALLEY

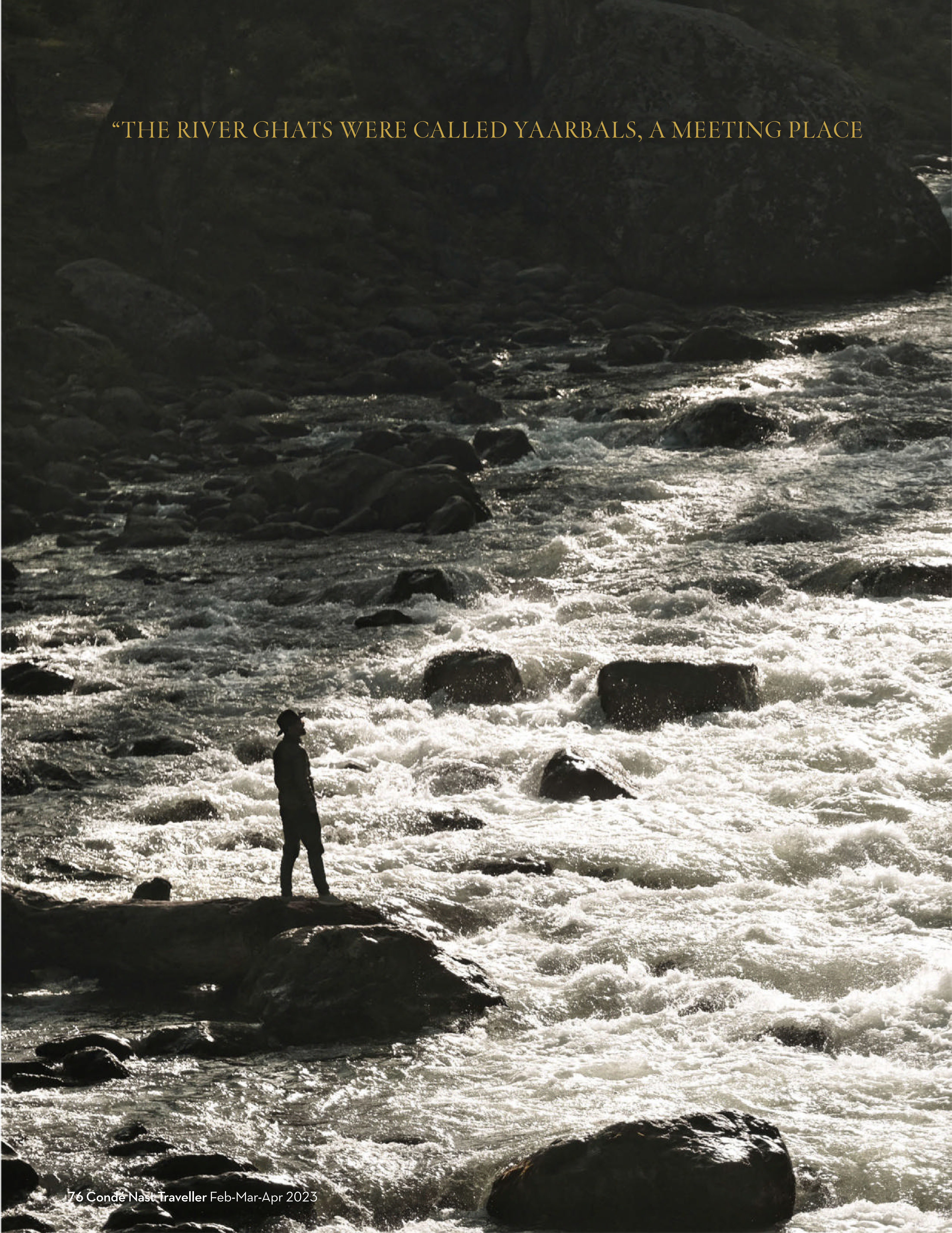
In Kashmir, food is poetry, lavishness, precision—the right bread for an occasion or time of day; saffron, the world’s most expensive spice, infused in the daily cups of kahwa. It’s also where you can taste history and form connections when speaking can be difficult. In Srinagar, restaurant Lhasa, with its menu of Tibetan staples and Kashmiri fare, is testimony to a lesser-known slice of history; it was set up by Abdul Rehman Zareif, a descendant of the Kashmiri Muslims who moved to Tibet as traders around the 14th-17th centuries where they settled and prospered for generations, until the Chinese invasion led them back rather recently in 1959.

I am surprised to find that the food offering of tehri or tehar (a local turmeric rice) served to devotees at Srinagar’s Zeashta Devi Temple is also given out at the Charar-e-Sharief shrine to Sheikh Nuruddin as blessed food to the faithful; Gulzar tells us it is also served at langar in gurudwaras here.

Food is often the easiest way to experience the ties between communities, and I really enjoy contrasting the subtle differences between the lavish feasts of the Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits at the sprawling and indulgent Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, Pine N Peak, Pahalgam. This is one of the few establishments where you can dig into mini-versions of both the Muslim wazwan and the Pandit saal. “The demand and curiosity of customers to try these local cuisines promoted us to have these on the menu,” says the soft-spoken general manager Roop Pandita, who was born and brought up in this locale. “Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims primarily focus on meat,” he explains. Both spreads bear a Central Asian influence, though key ingredients differ: the mutton rogan josh, for example, gains its vivid red from cockscomb in the wazwan and from the spike of red chilli powder in the saal.

Pahalgam translates to “Shepherds’ Village” and travellers can taste a lesser-known slice of Kashmir’s culinary heritage and connect with the nomadic Bakarwals and semi-nomadic Gujjars over a meal at the decade-old nonprofit Shepherd Crafts. It was founded by Ramneek Kaur, the fourth-generation daughter of the family behind the Bollywood favourite Pahalgam Hotel. The initiative spurs the economic empowerment of the local pastoral communities through crafts, activities and food (and soon, rooms for stay), at a time when traditional practices from wearing embroidered caps and chunky jewellery to gundani hair-braiding are fading away. The Shepherd’s

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: **view from the room and the Kashmiri Pandit saal at Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, Pine N Peak, Pahalgam; alpine landscape in Sonamarg; horse riding in Pahalgam**



"THE RIVER GHATS WERE CALLED YAARBALS, A MEETING PLACE

FOR FRIENDS AND A SPACE FOR WOMEN TO COME TOGETHER”

The gushing Lidder River skirts the town of Pahalgam

Meal is served beside the Lidder River, and prepared for contemporary tastes with the shepherds' fresh, organic, surplus produce of the day. I love that our Gujjar host Reshma describes the stir-fried wild spinach on my plate as "God-given vegetables" as it is foraged rather than cultivated. It is a tasty accompaniment to gucchi pulao made with the expensive wild morels, fried trout masala, makai roti, kidney beans and the signature, mozzarella-like, roti-shaped, cheese "kalari" that is spiced with red chilli powder and pan-fried.

A traditional cheese that provides daily sustenance to the Gujjars as they traverse with their herds between the mountains of Jammu & Kashmir and the plains, kalari emerged on the world cheese map thanks to Himalayan Cheese in nearby Langanbal village. Kashmir-based Dutchman Chris Zandee founded the pioneering enterprise in 2007, to create a community-oriented, fair-trade business that would help empower the Gujjars. "The Gujjars make kalari in the summer as they have excess milk while out on the mountain pastures, far from their customers in the plains where they take their whole household in the winter," Chris says. "It is similar to Swiss farmers who make their cheese in the mountains in the summer so they can transport and preserve their milk in the form of cheese. It is a very rich heritage but sadly we celebrate the Swiss and romanticise them but we look down on our own farmers and neglect them and don't celebrate their customs and life."

Chris first saw Pahalgam as a traveller, while trekking on holiday. "A conflict zone drives businesses away," says Chris. "I am a farmer's son and I wanted to do something for the farmers. The first cheese [his wife] Kamala and I made was with a kit on our knees, then we went back to Holland and learned at farmhouses." Their artisanal cheese store stocks kalari alongside varieties of the Dutch Gouda and cheddar, jams and honey, and has expanded to Srinagar, where Kamala has a counselling practice. Having seen them receive the homegrown brand excellence award at *Condé Nast Traveller's* Top Restaurant Awards back home in Mumbai in 2018, it feels incredible to be here, watching local Gujjar woman Amina separate curds from whey at their small factory in this sylvan setting. As I narrow down on their Frisian clove Gouda as my favourite, I realise that Chris' deep questions apply to far more than working with the pastoralist Gujjars to craft a sustainable livelihood in a digital age: "What is that heritage that allows everyone to come up? Do we want to stop time or to celebrate the heritage that the people choose?"

Back in Srinagar, I am most reminded of Kashmir's delicate heritage when I am startled by the deep and reverberating call of a hangul. It is the closest I come to the critically endangered Kashmiri stag whose last resort is the Dachigam National Park.

Little remains though of Burzahom, a thirty-minute drive from the city. Also called Srinagar's Stonehenge, the Neolithic site is home to a cluster of menhirs that mark the home of Kashmir's first settlers. Their view of the setting is still pretty much the same as ours, and one of their rock carvings (now moved to Kolkata) is—incredibly—thought by experts to be the world's first recorded supernova and the oldest skychart. A 20-minute drive away lie the quiet ruins of Harwan monastery, a rare reminder that Buddhism held sway in Kashmir for over a 1,000 years and flowed down the Silk Road to Ladakh, Tibet and China. With excavated artefacts now shifted to museums far afield, all that's left to see at these places is what was here before it all began: trees, rocks, water, sky and that mountain calm.

A similar trip can be organised by Frozen Himalayas (frozenhimalayas.com)

WHERE TO STAY

QAYAAM GAH
The three-acre property set on a ridge in the Zabarwan Hills is a sumptuously designed nature retreat with a Sufi theme. It is an ideal place for those who want to experience mountain solitude with easy access to Srinagar's sights. The resort includes an outdoor infinity pool and a restaurant that rustles up a fine range from Kashmiri breads to fresh trout in lemon garlic butter sauce. Don't miss the high tea on the deck accompanied by live music and sunset views of the Dal Lake. (*abchapriretreats.in; doubles from ₹52,920 for a minimum two-night stay*)

SUKOON HOUSEBOAT
A gorgeous, eco-friendly houseboat anchored in a quiet corner of the Dal Lake, Sukoon exudes old-world charm. There are five en-suite bedrooms and a dining room where you can feast on a range of local and Continental delicacies (get the chicken saffron broth). Enjoy views of the lake from the sun deck or go for a ride on the hotel shikara. (*abchapriretreats.in; doubles from ₹17,842*)

RAH BAGH
This three-acre resort is set against the backdrop of the Zabarwan hills and surrounded by an apple orchard and poplar trees. There are 33 sunlit rooms and suites with private balconies or sit-outs. Plus a gym, pool and spa to unwind in. (*rahbagh.com; doubles from ₹15,400*)

WELCOMHOTEL BY ITC HOTELS, PINE N PEAK, PAHALGAM
Set atop Rajwas Plateau with the Lidder River rushing by, this elegant retreat is particularly perfect for a family getaway, with activities including bonfire evenings, billiards and carrom, spa therapies and mixology sessions. Splurge on the two-bedroom presidential suite, beautifully dressed in Kashmiri tapestry and woodwork, for a special occasion. The food is expansive and top-notch, definitely try the local gucchi (morel) delicacies. (*itchotels.com; doubles from ₹22,500*)

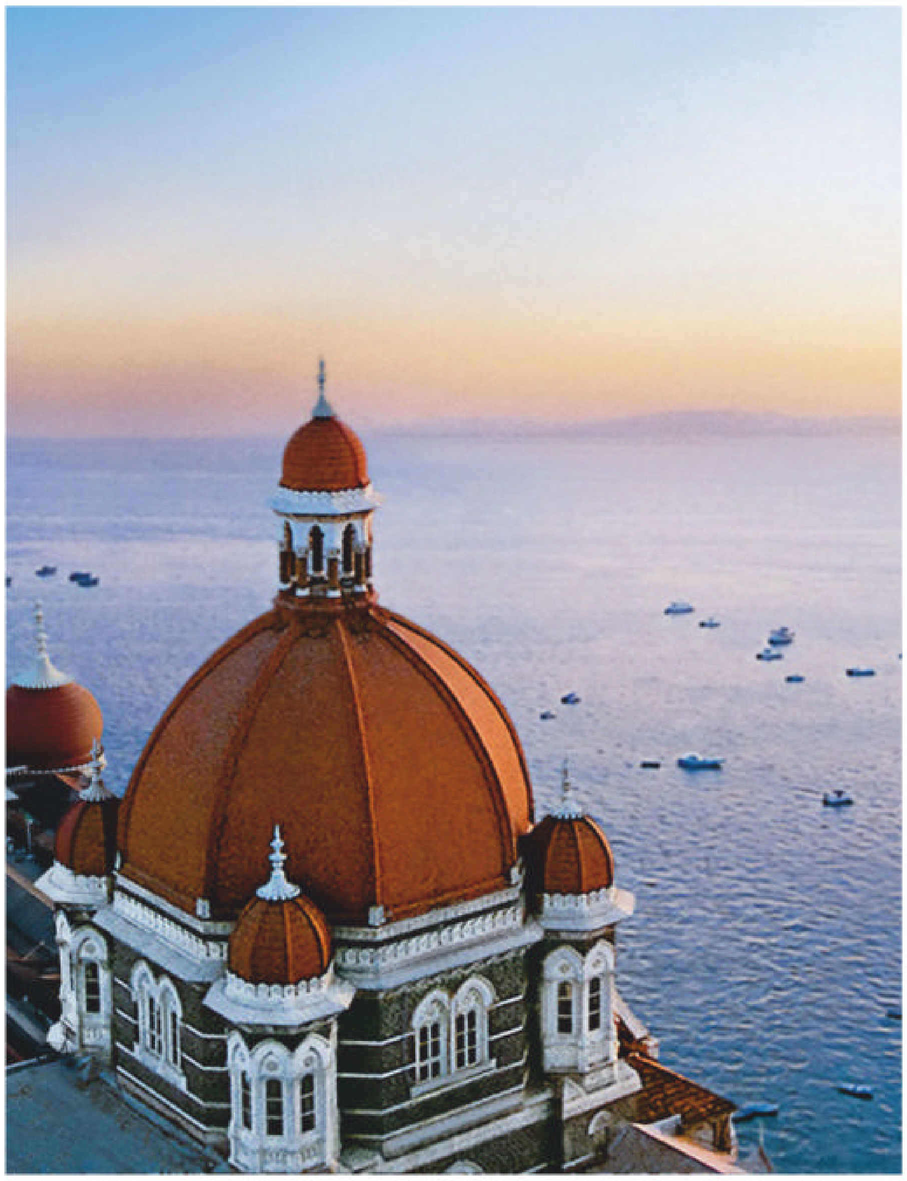
PAHALGAM HOTEL
This heritage property built in 1931 is a Bollywood favourite and has been the backdrop for numerous films. There are 45 well-appointed suites and rooms which offer a spectacular view of the Lidder River and the surrounding mountains. (*pahalgamhotel.com; doubles from ₹17,000*)

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: **Dutchman Chris Zandee and his wife Kamala of Himalayan Cheese; local Kashmiri kalari and Dutch varietals make up the inventory at Himalayan Cheese; exterior and one of the five bedrooms inside Sukoon Houseboat**

THE GOLD LIST 2023

The editors' all-time favourite hotels

PHOTOGRAPH: OBEROI HOTELS AND RESORTS



THE TAJ MAHAL PALACE, MUMBAI

INDIA

Livid at being turned away from the Watson's Hotel—because "dogs and Indians" were not allowed—Jamsetji Tata went on to build one of the finest hotels in the world. Great story, but not true. The architect who designed The Taj Mahal Palace jumped into the sea when he saw that they built it the wrong way. Terrible story, also not true. The book of mythology where these come from has many more stories and most of them are actually true. It is true that Mountbatten made his final address at this hotel before leaving the Indian shores. Also true that Sarojini Naidu held a suite for over a decade, retreating there when things soured at home. That a horse once walked up its grand staircase for a charity ball and a Maharaja nearly checked in a pet tiger! That the staff brought in the carpenters to fit all 6 ft 2 inches of Gregory Peck in the bed. That even today, Husain and Raza live on through their art. That matches are made over afternoon tea at the Sea Lounge; that Ronnie and his service was half the legend that is Wasabi; that many, like Shankar who retires in April after 40 years, are proud of it being their "first and last job". First date, first deal, first meal for the parents to celebrate your first job—the Taj has been a part of many stories that roll up into the story of the great city which it crowns. SALIL DESHPANDE *Doubles from ₹33,000; tajhotels.com*

THE LEELA PALACE BENGALURU

INDIA

Aesthetically, The Leela Palace is an exuberant, contemporary mish-mash of architectural styles and interiors. Its Art Deco design has colonial touches, and South Indian temple art meets Rajasthani artisanal craft. No holds are barred with the 20-foot sandstone pillars, 24-carat gold-leaf accents, crystal chandeliers, floral frescoes, hand-tufted carpets, and elaborate flower arrangements. Ever since I have been visiting in the mid-2000s, the atmosphere has always been festive, quite unlike the idea of a standard business hotel. But then again, The Leela has never fit that mould. This is a slice of Bengaluru writ large, from the shorts-wearing founders holding Zoom meetings at breakfast to the lively conversations and packed tables at Jamavar, the hit Indian restaurant, and friends brunching for hours on Sundays at Citrus, The Leela's all-day diner. There is also a gentleness to life here, with guests soothed along by an unobtrusive butler service, the possibility of strolls around the lush, verdant grounds, and live music accompanying rare single malts in The Library Bar. Pleasingly, not much has changed since the hotel's opening in 2001, but some shifts are welcome, including the recent meticulous touching up of the famous gold on the ceilings. The Leela generates almost all the electricity it needs from its own wind farms, and a bottling plant is in the works, too—proof that its future is green as well as gold. PRASAD RAMAMURTHY *Doubles from about ₹28,743; theleela.com*

SUJÁN SHER BAGH

RANTHAMBHORE, RAJASTHAN

I find myself heading to SUJÁN Sher Bagh over and over again as it abuts Ranthambhore, my favourite forest on the planet, teeming with wildlife and relaxed tiger sightings. The superlative camp recently upped the ante with a dynamic renovation, which opens it up to the expansive views of grasslands and a hill beyond. The vista can be enjoyed from a sprawling and stylish set of spaces that weaves in the bar, dining area, library, open-air deck, and a large outdoor pool. Hidden behind a grove of trees, brimming with birdsong and an occasional troupe of langurs, are twelve luxe temperature-controlled tents, including a royal suite and two imperial suites with their own pools in private compounds. At Sher Bagh, I never leave the forest. The elegant olive and beige tones, the campaign furniture, and the thickly grouped wildlife photographs keep me firmly under its spell. My safari-rattled bones seek sanctuary in the spa and the deeply talented chefs serve up delicious Rajasthani and international fare in atmospheric settings. A member of Relais & Châteaux, Sher Bagh is attuned to the highest standards of cosseting and spoiling, and their personalised service makes for an uplifting stay. There are surprises aplenty such as the porridge served from a copper cauldron with a tot of rum early in the morning en route to the jeep. Most of all, I love the genuine passion for wildlife shared by its staff, with locals making up 86 per cent of it. It bubbles up in their stories and anecdotes, and in the showing of the pugmarks of the tigers and leopards that occasionally slink by at night. It is a place alive with excitement. GEETIKA JAIN *Doubles from ₹79,000 thesujanlife.com*

ITC GRAND CHOLA

CHENNAI, INDIA

About a decade ago, the ITC built upon its presence in the South through this magnificent luxury hotel that channels the grand Chola empire. With 600 rooms spread across 1.6 million sq ft, 10 dining experiences, a ballroom that can take over 5,000 guests, and a 23,000-sq ft spa with 12 treatment rooms, it pays a fitting tribute to the scale of the medieval kingdom. Through its art and decor, it honours the aesthetic. Palatial doors, tall ceilings from where hang brilliant chandeliers, a grand staircase, and seemingly eternal corridors inspired by Chola temples all pair to build a stately aura. And yet, despite all the scale and the opulence, the ITC Grand Chola retains a personal touch. I have been here innumerable times and was left delighted each time over how the team of well-trained butlers remembers exactly what I like. Mornings unfailingly start with a cup of freshly brewed South Indian filter coffee. My meal at Pan Asian begins with a sashimi platter, just the way it did when I dined there the first time nine years ago. And at Avartana—which ranks among India's top restaurants per *Condé Nast Traveller*—I know I can count on the French Press Rasam to deliver comforting flavours. The fact that all this luxury comes with an LEED certification for eco-consciousness is pure golden. ASHWIN RAJAGOPALAN *Doubles from ₹16,000; itchotels.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **ATUL PRATAP CHAUHAN; SUJÁN**

THE OBEROI UDAIVILAS

UDAIPUR, INDIA

Way before "experiential" became every hotelier's buzzword of choice, Udaivilas, the biggest of The Oberoi's five resorts, was love-bombing its guests with adventures, offering a taster or full immersion in Indian heritage. From tandoor cookery to tabla recitals under the stars, Udaivilas—the ultimate "destination hotel"—encourages the culturally curious to get under the skin of the country. My own experience at its launch 20 years ago was an out-of-body awakening: orange light appeared before my closed eyes as warm oil poured onto my forehead (the third-eye chakra), releasing a lifetime of emotional baggage. My introduction to place and practice was eased by the sanitised perfection of the surroundings in Udaipur, India's most romantic city, which is defined by the fairy-tale extravagance of its palaces. Whether floating in the pool spa suspended over Lake Pichola, wallowing in a chequerboard "step-well" pool, surrounded by gold-leafed cupolas, or ascending stairways that lift the gaze to heaven, Udaivilas' guests experience the perfect marriage of spiritual and sensual. Built on former royal hunting grounds overlooking the Aravalli Hills, swathes of this 50-acre property remain a wild peacock- and deer-filled sanctuary, with the rest now landscaped gardens. Running water threads through fountain-studded courtyards into a wraparound pool you can swim in, with the vast expanse of water reflecting open skies or the flickering light of nocturnal flares. CATHERINE FAIRWEATHER *Doubles from ₹53,457; oberoihotels.com*

THE RITZ-CARLTON, PUNE

INDIA

There's a certain allure to this hotel. You could peg it to the gilded opulence that greets you at every turn: chandelier-spangled interiors, Greco-Roman figurines, colonial-era prints and portraits of Peshwas, Pune's erstwhile rulers. There's also that fulfilling decadence of The Ritz-Carlton high tea and the soothing cocoon that the spa offers. If you are travelling on business, it blends the convenience of being in one of Pune's corporate zones with access to the sort of facilities that approximate having an office away from the office. But its thoughtfulness and attention to detail make for hospitality gold: small touches such as the physical intimacy kit placed among the in-room amenities or having your clothes steamed or ironed within the hour. The in-room smart TVs have the coolest motion sensor clickers. Outside of the rooms, the Ritz has a strong F&B game, which even the locals swear by. On a packed Wednesday night at the inventive Japanese restaurant Ukiyo, I had a succulent yellowtail carpaccio paired with a smoky, tea-infused negroni. The yellowtail, mind you, was specially glazed with a gluten-free soy reduction to accommodate one of my several food no-nos. Then there was the 36-hour pickled arvi at the rooftop Indian restaurant Aasmana—I would go again just to have that. The sunset views are a plus. At the end of the day, what you really want from a hotel is a good bed. As a sufferer of chronic back problems, for its mattresses alone, I could place this property on the Gold List. PR *Doubles from ₹22,000; ritzcarlton.com*

THE SAVOY

LONDON, UK

At university, I was in a doomed relationship with a girl and feeling extremely sorry for myself. Luckily, I had a generous aunt, who would say: "If you can stop moping and get to London by 6pm, I'll meet you in the American Bar and you can tell me all about it." I'd jump on a train, then hoof it from King's Cross to The Savoy. I'd gaze for a moment at the sign on the chrome-bright Strand-facing portico, spin past a top-hatted doorman, glide across the chequered-marble lobby floor, make a sharp left up carpeted steps, pad along a passage lined with photographs, and enter—heart racing, spirits already lifting—the American Bar. There my aunt would be waiting, serenely seated at a table on the river side with a bottle of Champagne. That's how I fell in love with The Savoy, but it's by no means the only reason why, almost 30 years and goodness knows how many visits later, I still love it. The Savoy is big and complicated, and its paradoxes are essential to its appeal. You can't even see the Thames from the so-called Thames Foyer, yet there's a riparian aspect to that stupendous space, with its palette of pale greens, the light filtered through a stained-glass dome, the staff eddying around the ornate winter-garden gazebo. The entire place, actually, is a gorgeous bundle of stylistic contradictions—high Victorian, plush Edwardian, flapper-tastic Art Deco—that adds up to much more than the sum of its parts. Like most of the hotels we refer to as "classic" or "an institution" and think of as monolithic and unchanging, The Savoy hasn't stayed still. A shortlist of its innovations between its 1889 opening and 1926, when the godlike Harry Craddock took over the American Bar, would include the introduction of electric light in all rooms, hydraulic lifts (note the absence of a central staircase), and proper ventilation in the kitchens; the thé dansant; and at least a dozen of the finest cocktails to have befuddled the world. So it continues. In 2021, the Royal Suite was restyled with irresistible flair by Gucci. And, last year, Restaurant 1890 by Gordon Ramsay opened in a former private dining room above the legendary Savoy Grill. Before he returned to Florence to start his little luggage business, Guccio Gucci worked as a porter at The Savoy—another layer of charm. Plus, the menu at 1890 is inspired by the recipes of the greatest chef who ever lived, Auguste Escoffier, who hit the big time at—guess where—The Savoy. STEVE KING *Doubles from ₹65,556; fairmont.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **AMAN DESHMUKH; OBEROI HOTELS AND RESORTS**

SINGITA KWITONDA LODGE

MUSANZE, RWANDA

With a mission as bold as its design, Singita Kwitonda is the only lodge abutting Volcanoes National Park and is closest to park headquarters. Arriving here is to tumble into the warm embrace of intuitive service and deep-dish comfort. From the nourishing food tucked into your daypack to the hiking gear on standby, all the thinking is done for you, freeing you up to enjoy the experience of meeting animals that share 98 per cent of your DNA: gorillas. Chiselled from volcanic rock, bamboo and eucalyptus, Kwitonda's soft-edged interiors champion local crafts and rooms offer views of the volcanic peaks protruding from the cloud forest's mists, while large bathrooms double up as in-room spas with massage tables for therapists to soothe post-trek muscle fatigue. Downtime is easily filled by yoga, village visits or nature walks led by conservationists, who will explain the value of rewilding: Singita's reforestation goals have already seen it plant more than 2,50,000 trees, shrubs and orchids. As a solo traveller, nothing beats dining sociably on braised short rib, risotto, and garden greens while watching graduates from Singita's new community culinary school learn from the accomplished chefs. I ended the evening in my suite, which—equipped with books, art supplies, a wood-burning outdoor fireplace, and a heated pool—felt like a cocoon amid the falling rain. JANE BROUGHTON *Doubles from about ₹4,03,517; singita.com*

HÔTEL DU PALAIS BIARRITZ

FRANCE

Back in 1854, when Napoleon III bought a beachfront property in sleepy Biarritz and built a palatial holiday home for his wife, Empress Eugénie, little did he imagine that the crowned heads of Europe would follow suit and turn the city into a buzzy resort with a casino. Now, after a massive four-year renovation, the former Villa Eugenie, transformed into the stately fin-de-siècle grande dame Hôtel du Palais in 1892, is ready for her close-up. Talk about imperial presence: everything from the fairy-tale frescoed ballroom to the plush Napoléon III Bar, crowned with a 400-kg crystal chandelier, calls for a light-hearted waltz, flute of vintage Bollinger in hand. Add to that the impressive antique-reviving craftsmanship: armchairs, curtains, bedspreads, mouldings. But there's nothing museum-like about the 142 rooms and suites—places to throw open the windows, breathe in the ocean air and watch the spectacle (the beach below, La Grande Plage, is a big-wave surfer territory). Nautical details, like the porthole windows on the upper floor, abound. The ocean-liner vibe continues at the panoramic, curved La Rotonde, where Chef Aurélien Largeau whips up eight-course seafood menus; homestyle Basque cooking can be found at the informal Côté Maison next door. The emblematic high point is the 32,000sq ft Guerlain Imperial Spa (Guerlain invented a cologne in 1853 just for Eugénie) for its regal Black Orchid facial treatment. LANIE GOODMAN *Doubles from ₹34,292; hyatt.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **TANVEER BADAL; MAITE PHOTO/HYATT; SINGITA**

HOTEL ESENCIA

XPU-HA, MEXICO

While Playa del Carmen and Tulum on Mexico's Riviera Maya teeter towards overdevelopment, there's still an unspoiled coastline between the two fast-growing towns. Near the powdery white sands of Xpu-Ha, the secluded jungle hideaway of Hotel Esencia is a reprieve from bustling resorts and hedonistic eco-hotels—yet offers all the trappings needed to never leave its grounds. Originally built as a haven for an Italian duchess, the 50-acre estate was acquired in 2014 by Hollywood producer Kevin Wendle, who has turned the property into the area's chicest beachside retreat. Beloved by tastemakers such as Bella Hadid and Lupita Nyong'o for its privacy, Hotel Esencia centres around a main house, where afternoon tea is served daily in the ocean-facing library, while stone paths lead to four expansive guest villas and 47 suites, each with a private terrace, and some with a heated pool and solarium overlooking the Caribbean. The newest and most luxurious lodgings are at the Esencia Mansion, a four-bedroom villa with three swimming pools, a 20-seat screening room, subterranean speakeasy and nearby cenote where guests can paddleboard among the resident manatees. To recharge, there's a café offering Mexican pastries, a juice bar for smoothies and acai bowls, and three restaurants, including a Yucatán eatery serving dishes with Mediterranean flair, from green gazpacho topped with crab to grilled octopus layered with creamy garlic mole. MICHAELA TRIMBLE *Doubles from ₹89,788; hotelesencia.com*

SÃO LOURENÇO DO BARROCAL

ALENTEJO, PORTUGAL

A morning saunter through this 2,000-acre estate in Portugal's Alentejo is a sensory journey back in time. Paths carve through the montado landscape, where wild-flower meadows are punctuated by cork, oak, and olive trees. Lusitano wild horses mingle with cattle; the mediaeval hilltop town of Monsaraz looms in the distance and granite dolmens give a glimpse of the region's pagan past. Despite being just 90 minutes from Lisbon, it's conceivable that these views haven't changed in centuries. The same cannot be said for São Lourenço's luxurious lodgings. Balancing the rustic and the refined, the agricultural and the artful, is where this elegant 40-room hotel and organic working farm excels. Humble, whitewashed farm buildings have been sensitively transformed into sophisticated suites centred around a geranium-lined courtyard. The guest activities—beekeeping lessons, foraging and stargazing (the region is a Dark Sky Reserve)—are almost as old as the surrounding hills. Two centuries of winemaking heritage make São Lourenço a key stop-off on Alentejo's rota dos vinhos, which winds through the region's best wineries. Here, robust native varietals have been skilfully tempered down and pair beautifully with polished takes on traditional dishes—gazpacho, migas, and cozido stews—that are as nourishing as late nights by the firepit. Effortlessly stylish yet wholly unpretentious, this rural retreat provides a compelling case for swapping Portugal's coast for its countryside. BEN OLSEN *Doubles from ₹36,313; barrocal.pt*

TIERRA PATAGONIA

CHILE

A room with a view is enduringly special. But one that frames such retina-searing scenery is something else. All 40 rooms in this horseshoe-shaped hotel gaze up at the Paine Massif, rising beyond the Sarmiento Lake where waves roar when the wind picks up. Whether snuggled in a sheepskin rug on a windowsill or swimming in the infinity pool, those towers are transfixing and ever-changing with the weather. I've been to Chile's premier national park before but no mirador or mountain trail can match this view. A passion project for the ski-obsessed Purcell family, and now majority-owned by Australian remote-luxe pioneers Baillie Lodges, this environmentally sensitive property is almost impossible to see from afar. By storing and replanting all vegetation on site, landscape artists Catalina Phillips and Gerardo Ariztia have created a wildlife haven where guanacos and rheas graze in the bush. Respect for culture and nature is everywhere, from dioramas depicting Chile's history of exploration to Calafate sours made with locally produced berry liqueur at the bar. Excursions appreciate people and place: visiting ancient burial sites and the chance to shadow researchers studying pumas in their natural habitat. Set in prime gaucho land on the fringes of the national park, Tierra offers a chance to see and do Patagonia differently, starting and always ending with that unbeatable view. SARAH MARSHALL *Doubles from ₹3,40,523 (three-night minimum); tierrahotels.com*

CHEVAL BLANC ST-BARTH

SAINT-BARTHÉLEMY, CARIBBEAN

In a hidden corner of St. Barts, down a steep and winding mountainous road, you come to a Gauguin-like canopy of lush green vegetation, beyond which the half-moon sandy perfection of Flamands beach reveals itself and the Cheval Blanc reigns supreme. Low-built and quietly sprawling, the property was elegantly renovated following Hurricane Irma by Parisian design supremo Jacques Grange, whose interiors speak to a chic European aesthetic of quiet indulgences: linens and ikat prints, palettes of pale greens, blues and pinks, and raffia, bamboo and stone accents. The atmosphere is almost Parisian (Bulgari hosts a fashion show here and there's a Guerlain spa on the premises) but with a devil-may-care attitude. Young French culinary star Jean Imbert's creole-inspired menu at La Case (and laid-back beach restaurant La Cabane) is light but gastronomic and the cocktails are sublime. I spend my lunches feet in the sand at La Cabane, watching a parade of Birkin-bag-carrying Upper East Side ladies power-walking along the beach, moguls on their phones doing business and boho French girls running into the waves in tiny Eres bikinis. It reminds me of St-Tropez's Plage de Pampelonne, but a lot less frenetic, and with an ambience that's both relaxed and indulgent. My assigned butler WhatsApps me when my room is done or a spa appointment is due. But it's my private yoga sessions in the garden's pagoda with the late Alber Elbaz's personal instructor, Nicolas Legrez, that I won't forget in a hurry. VASSI CHAMBERLAIN *Doubles from ₹65,877; chevalblanc.com*

RAFFLES HOTEL

SINGAPORE

Even the oldest of grand old ladies can reinvent themselves. Originally opened in 1887, Singapore's most iconic hotel relaunched in 2019 after a two-year transformation that stripped it down to its masonry. This elegant new incarnation celebrates the national monument's historical charms while ushering it into the future. Some things haven't changed: the Grand Lobby remains as "airy as a birdcage", to borrow Joseph Conrad's apt description. An immense crystal chandelier refracts sunlight from the overhead skylight across the three-storey space's alabaster walls, marble floors, and striking bronze screens, while pockets of plush seating offer an intimate setting for Raffles' famed afternoon tea. The apartment-like suites embrace nostalgia—sleek, dark-wood furniture complements original teak flooring—while incorporating every modern necessity, and books by local authors nod to the literary elite (Noël Coward, Rudyard Kipling, and Pablo Neruda) who have stopped over. Raffles' mix of local and international flavours, from the Tiffin Room's North Indian cuisine to menus by Anne-Sophie Pic and Alain Ducasse, draws both locals and visitors. A new Writers Bar serves literature-inspired craft cocktails, while the Long Bar remains the place to sip a Singapore Sling and chuck peanut shells under the counter—the only place in Singapore where littering is de rigueur. SHAMILEE VELLU *Doubles from ₹80,696; raffles.com*

RAFFLES HOTEL

PHOTOGRAPHS: **RORY WYLIE; PAUL GERMAN; E LABOUERIE; RAFFLES SINGAPORE**

PHOTOGRAPHS: BABYLONSTOREN; CROOKES & JACKSON; DOOKPHOTO.COM/BABYLONSTOREN

BABYLONSTOREN

SIMONDIUM, SOUTH AFRICA

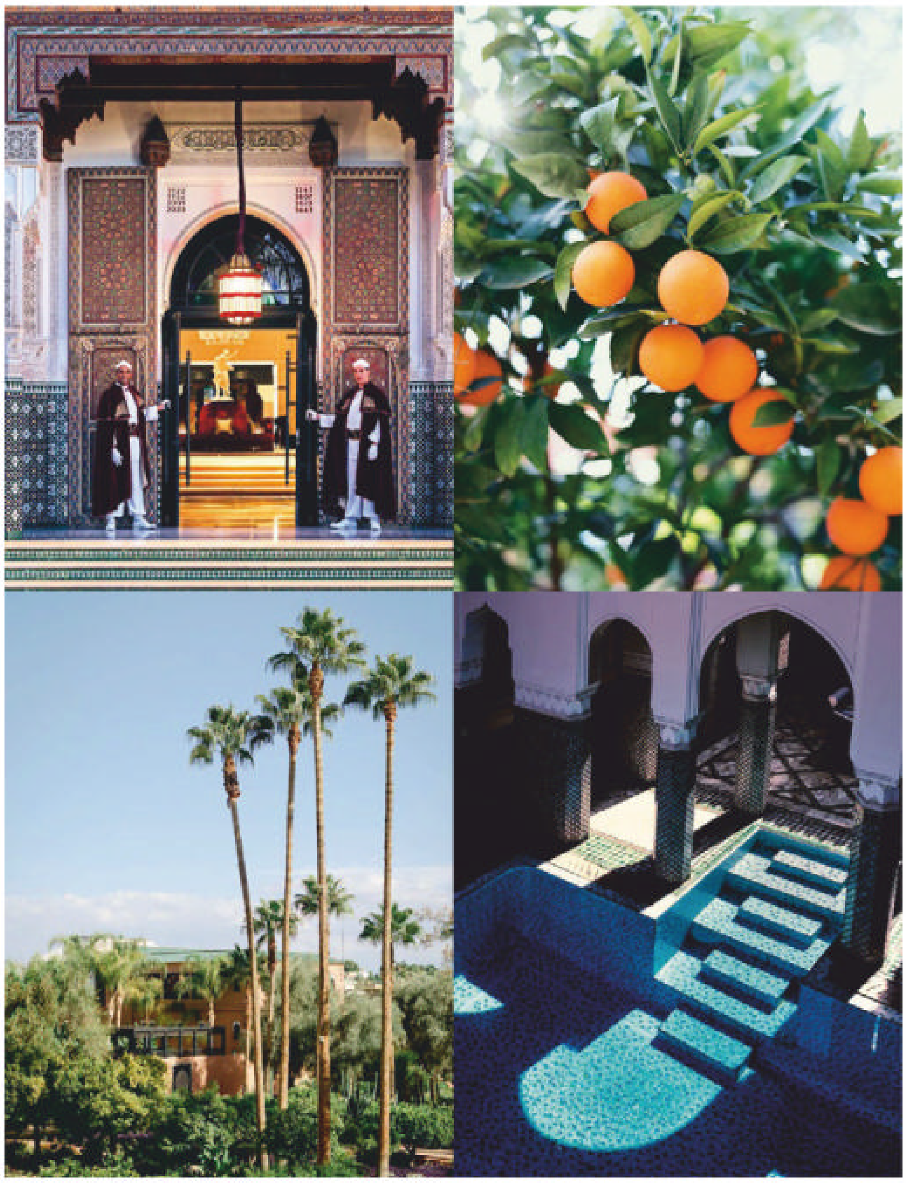
Drive off the dusty Cape roads, through vines and fruit trees, and tractors trundle by, laden with grapes and peaches. Arrive at Babylonstoren and there's a donkey for children to pat, and a restaurant in an old cowshed. That the farm cottages, surrounded by the towering Simonsberg mountains, rolling vineyards and miles of fragrant fynbos, transmit the feeling of home is probably because the 495-acre, 17th-century Cape Dutch estate is a home. Babylonstoren belongs to Karen Roos, the former editor of South African Elle Decoration, who created the iconic eight acre, Patrice Taravella-designed formal garden and planted it with more than 300 varieties of medicinal and edible plants. When the place opened, Roos built 13 Cape Dutch farm-worker cottages beside the garden, each with a contemporary glass "box" kitchen in which guests could cook fresh ingredients. Then she converted barns and stables into characterful family rooms. In the past few years, she has added a scattering of charming Fynbos Cottages among indigenous landscaping.

For full immersion into Roos's impeccable taste, it is possible to take over her antique- and art-filled farmstead, which dates back to 1777. Families can stay in the new, five-bedroom Fynbos Family House, with its characterful mix of worn and contemporary pieces, and let kids roam wild in the bush. I've been five times and whenever I return, there's something new to explore, such as a farm shop stocked with tempting local cheese, Malay-spiced chutneys, Cape gooseberry jams and home-flavoured biltong. Or a bakery, at night transformed into a wood-fired pizza restaurant. Or a soap factory, adjoining a cavernous room stocked with Babylonstoren body products. Or an olive press, supplying delicious oils. Or, most recently, a wine cellar and museum, which tells the story of wine through inventive tools, including a cinema screen inside a giant barrel. The sprawling vegetable gardens are a particular treat, with their chicken runs, beehives and pergolas of roses. And long lazy lunches in the Greenhouse or Babel restaurants should be followed with a hammam and massage in the new spa. On my last trip, I went fishing and kayaking on little dams and lounged beside the new pool and jacuzzi, surrounded by rock gardens. I hung out in a light-filled, whitewashed cottage cooking fresh produce in the glass-fronted kitchen, reading by a fire and soaking in a deep bathtub fragranced with fresh herbs before a nightcap on the little veranda, the air thick with silence and lit by the moon and the Milky Way. Babylonstoren paved the way for cool farm stays. This is a grounded space in which you can slow down, lift your eyes to the big Cape skies and breathe. LISA GRAINGER *Doubles from ₹54,469; babylonstoren.com*

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL ISTANBUL AT SULTANAHMET

ISTANBUL, TURKEY

My favourite building in Istanbul, indeed the world, is not the 15-storey-high dome of Hagia Sophia, but a saffron-yellow former prison built in 1918 that was reincarnated in 1996 as the Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul at Sultanahmet. Thanks to my father, a retired hotelier, I had a peripatetic childhood as a hotel brat, staying, even living, in Hilton, Sheraton, and Mandarin Oriental hotels, from Istanbul to Egypt to Hong Kong. This led me to become a travel writer. One of my jobs was reporting on the Four Seasons in Sultanahmet and included a now only dreamed-of expense account and plenty of free Champagne. I took my then boyfriend to dinner for his birthday at its courtyard restaurant, Avlu, in an attempt to impress him with my worldliness. Some years later, we ended up getting married at the hotel. Minutes before the ceremony, I realised I had forgotten a bouquet. The staff swiftly sent two gorgeous arrangements to my door. We said our vows in a corner of the rooftop Süreyya Teras Lounge, with Hagia Sophia seemingly within touching distance. As we ate a sumptuous wedding dinner on a private terrace overlooking the Bosphorus, we noticed a rare celestial event: a partial eclipse of the moon. My 87-year-old grandmother's feet were suffering, so the hotel brought her a pair of soft terry slippers. We stayed in the erstwhile warden's office, a stunning two-storey suite with a huge arched window. We came back for our first anniversary and then our 10th, with two extra guests: our young sons. In 2022, the hotel reopened after a two-year redesign, with interiors revamped by London-based studio Goddard Littlefair. Now the lobby is like a microcosm of Sultanahmet: a patisserie, La Pistache, sells Turkish sweets; Sahaf, an antiquarian bookstore, has prints and maps; and a jewellery boutique dazzles and entices. The new main bar, Lingo Lingo, has a dining space that provides a singularly Turkish ritual: seafood and mezze with raki. The spa has been hugely expanded, adding a hammam and private treatment spaces. Avlu now serves modern Anatolian cuisine to tables surrounded by seasonal flowering plants. Near it is a "mescit": a blue-tiled prayer room that exudes tranquillity. Guests can hop on a private shuttle to the hotel's sister, a Four Seasons set in a 19th-century palace on the Bosphorus, lap in its waterfront outdoor pool, and loll in its awe-inspiring spa. The story of my husband and I includes the dramatic appearance of a double rainbow during a recent stay. My mother, whose happy place was also the Four Seasons, died in December 2021. She was no stranger to extravagant gestures, so I like to think that the rainbows were a message from her, welcoming us home. SEVIL DELIN *Doubles from ₹57,495; fourseasons.com*



LA MAMOUNIA

MARRAKECH, MOROCCO

On her 100th birthday, La Mamounia has emerged from the pandemic phoenix-like, glowing from Jouin Manku's 2020 makeover. The Netflix hit series *Inventing Anna* followed, with the hotel starring as the destination of choice for Anna Delvey (aka Anna Sorokin), the New York con woman famous for her exquisite taste. But what is the secret of La Mamounia's success? Sitting at the edge of the madcap medina, this public palace manages to be both exclusive and popular, providing the city with a spectacular stage. In the Pierre Hermé Salon de Thé, guests treating themselves to pastries are bathed in refracted light from a Lasvit chandelier that fills the courtyard. Next to the ruby-red Majorelle bar, L'Asiatique restaurant, with its Ming-dynasty-style chairs and black lacquer tables, is a vision of Deco decadence. Art deals are done to the sound of birdsong in the Italian restaurant open to the garden, while film festival moguls host money men in the sexy subterranean wine cellar or at the black-marble Churchill bar. Even on Sundays, local society packs the pool house for the epic buffet brunch. Ask any of them about La Mamounia and they will have a story. This pleases general manager Pierre Jochem. Like Anna Delvey, he understands that, in a world of limitless choice, relevance is everything. La Mamounia is still the talk of the town. PAULA HARDY *Doubles from ₹45,884; mamounia.com*

OCEAN HOUSE

RHODE ISLAND, USA

If you move in certain circles on the East Coast, the Ocean House will reliably drift into conversation. Loyalists—and there are legions—will anxiously compare notes on how to not miss out on that Atlantic-facing suite again; first timers will recount stories of cocktails on the resort's huge croquet lawn. This enormous yellow mansion, towering above a sandswept Rhode Island shoreline, occupied space in my mind long before I ever visited. Since opening its big, old wooden doors on the remote Watch Hill in 1868, Ocean House has doubled down on a version of hospitality that is timeless, thoughtful, personal, and easy. For me, that was having a cart full of toys pull up right next to my toddler as we checked in, and his delight at rummaging through the stash to find a shiny ball; or being sent slices of cake mid afternoon by intuitive staff who watched us chase our son as he chased that ball around the lawn. We'd saunter between the indoor pool and our room, which had bolthole windows, stacks of books nodding to the area's nautical and whaling pasts, and a terrace that looked out as far as New York State. When our son's nap forced us to miss our lunch reservation, a trolley loaded with clam chowder, mounds of fries, club sandwiches and warm cookies was parked outside our door without request. Staying at Ocean House feels special and easy, which is a slam-dunk formula for a holiday you'd want to repeat year after year. ERIN FLORIO *From ₹39,734; oceanhouseri.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **ALAN KEOHANE/LA MAMOUNIA; MARK LUSCOMBE-WHYTE; CATHERINE MEAD; CLAIRE MENARY; DAVE SARAZEN FOR SOUTH COUNTY RHODE ISLAND TOURISM**

HOSHINOYA KYOTO

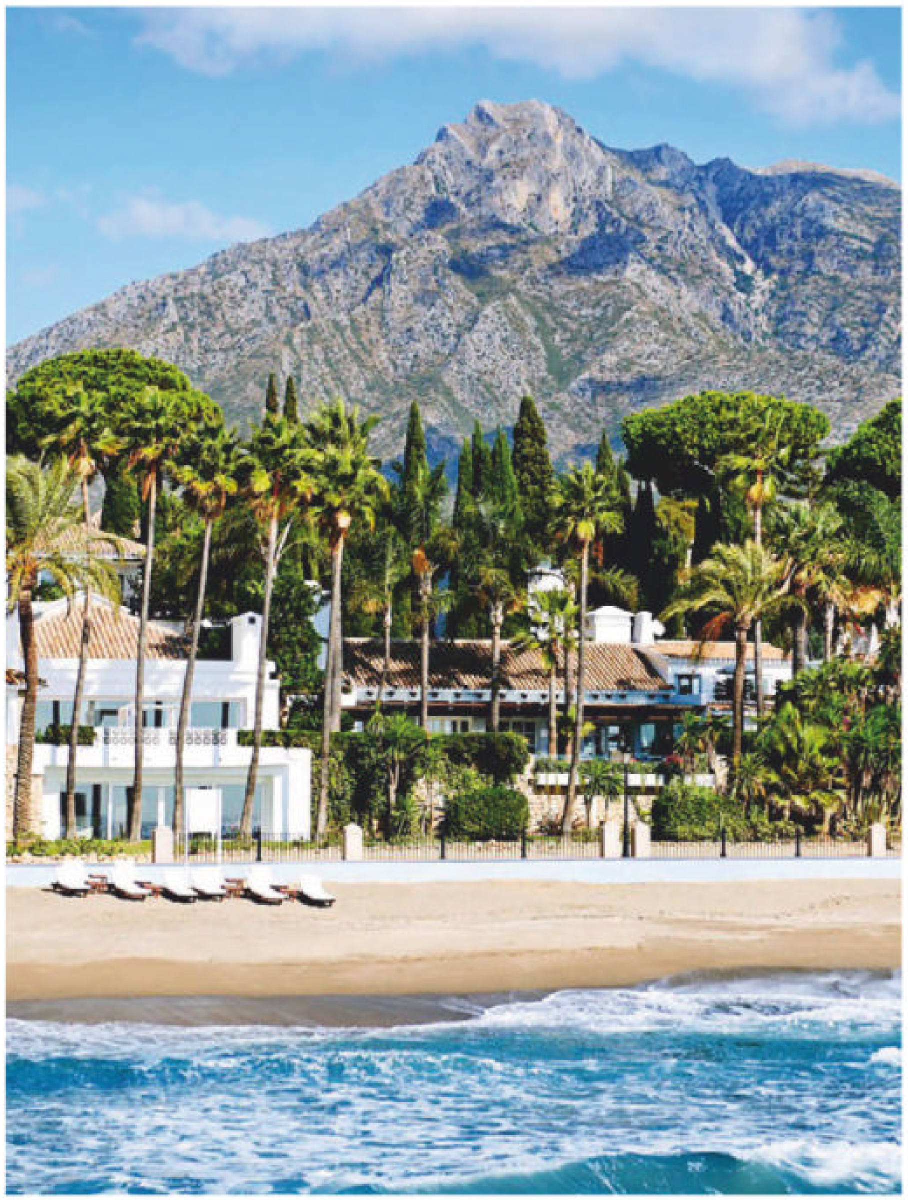
JAPAN

The glide of a narrow boat. The emerald swirl of a boulder-lined river. The steep, forested mountains. Staff bowing gently on a wooden pier alongside a trio of Harry Bertoia diamond chairs. This is the familiar scene that greets me on my return to Hoshinoya Kyoto for the first time in four years. Serene, secluded, and unwaveringly restorative, Hoshinoya Kyoto is a ryokan-style escape with a modern luxury edge. It's a world away from the kimono-clad tourists taking selfies in front of pagodas and, since opening in 2009, has provided the perfect antidote to temple fatigue. Nature is the main protagonist. A soul-soothing 15-minute boat journey transports visitors from the bamboo forests of Arashiyama to the hotel. Here, on a secluded mountainside overlooking the Oi River, 25 rooms are scattered among abundant gardens and ancient trees: autumn-blushed maples, cherry blossoms, and towering pines. The century-old buildings have river views and were given sensitive updates by architect Rie Azuma, with picture motifs on karakami paper above the beds, minimalist white screens, and hinoki bathtubs. The food is no less seductive, from seasonal dishes served with creative precision (beef fillet and red-bean miso wrapped in fig leaves is a favourite) to exquisite in-room breakfasts. It's a place where haikus are penned and sleep deficits are rebalanced. DANIELLE DEMETRIOU *Doubles from ₹81,196; hoshinoya.com*

MARBELLA CLUB

SPAIN

This heritage property on the Andalusian coast has been synonymous with unassuming luxury since it began life as a hangout for Prince Alfonso von Hohenlohe's friends in the 1950s. Over time, it has evolved from a string of Californian motel-inspired lodges into a rarefied village anchored by the beach. Yet, despite its growth, it has maintained the intimacy of a members' club. Post-pandemic additions such as El Patio restaurant draw upmarket locals to sip pressed juices after yoga classes or crisp rosés later on. The recent reincarnation of the iconic Beach Club, once erring on the side of silver-service, has an artisanal, eclectic feel, with vibrant corals, Art Deco-style umbrellas and hand-painted tiles. It's this rare combination of bohemian charm and specificity of service that is MC's interstellar dust. It's what brings smart young couples to lounge together under the citrus trees. It's why families gather poolside for languorous lunches. But the kids' club is the greatest triumph. There are exhaustive activities, gorgeous free-flow creative spaces, and engaging, energetic staff who work subtle magic. Having "encouraged" my own children into countless kids' clubs over the years, this is the only one that I have had to bribe them back out of. And happy children mean harmonious holidays: time to slink into the sea-gazing Thalasso spa, try some Kundalini yoga, or a little paddle surfing; perhaps even a zingy Zoco cocktail by the pool. Life is all about balance, after all. LYDIA GARD *Doubles from ₹39,337; marbellaclub.com*



KINLOCH LODGE

ISLE OF SKYE, UK

For half a century, Kinloch Lodge—tiny, remote, eccentric—has been among the best-loved Scottish hotels. Yet, when it opened in the spring of 1972, its proprietors, Claire and Godfrey Macdonald, were far from sure it would still be a going concern by the autumn. A couple of years previously, Godfrey had inherited a roster of ancient titles along with a vast estate. He had also inherited colossal debts. Kinloch, a run-down, whitewashed shooting lodge on ravishingly pretty Loch na Dal, near the southern tip of Skye, was practically all he and Claire had left. They welcomed their first guests to a hotel that had no electricity, only two log fires for heating and a single telephone under the stairs. Kinloch's reputation grew, however. The sheer beauty of the place. The unstuffy charm of the owners and their four kids—each of whom became adept at taking bookings and making beds. Claire's brilliant, ultra-local, entirely seasonal cooking, decades ahead of its time. In 2002, Godfrey and Claire retired and their daughter, Isabella, took over as manager. She has revamped the 18 rooms with sensitivity, flair, and discreet contemporary flourishes. There's still an heirloom-forward, country-house grandeur about it, but zero pomposity. Instead, a warmth and intimacy that derives from the Macdonalds' commitment to doing simple things very well and taking proper care of their guests. That sounds easy but isn't. Kinloch Lodge is one of a kind. STEVE KING *Doubles from ₹36,311; kinloch-lodge.co.uk*

NIHI SUMBA

INDONESIA

It's quite the schlep, getting to Nihi. There's that long flight to Bali, followed by a turboprop hop to Sumba island, to the east. And after touchdown, an hour and a half in the back of a safari jeep weaving through pancake-stacked rice fields and villages of thatched-roof huts. But as soon as you reach the wooden sign that reads, "Welcome to the edge of wildness", you already know you'd happily do it all over again. You'd do it for the view—and feel, if you surf—of those rolling aquamarine waves and the Sandalwood ponies trundling down the beach at sunrise. You'd do it for the villas, sprawling estates made from bamboo and ikat ensconced in gardens frothy with hot-pink bougainvillea. And you'd return for the immersive activities, too many to cram into a week-long stay, including picnics by glassy lagoons and guided shopping tours to pick up Sumbanese woodwork and baskets woven with palm fronds. But most of all, you come back because you know your contributions make a difference to the people on this rugged island. You'll see it first-hand at the malaria clinic just outside the resort gates, or during the voluntary English lessons and nutritional lunch programmes at local schools, all financed by The Sumba Foundation, of which Nihi and its cashed-up regulars are the main benefactors. Over the next two years, the company will grow with outposts on nearby Flores, Rote Island, just off West Timor, and northern Costa Rica; an exciting expansion of its give-back, do-good ethos. CHRIS SCHALKX *Doubles from ₹79,657; nihi.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **JONAS BJERRE-POULSEN; HELEN CATHCART; GEORG SCHORSCHAL**

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS SCHALKX

THE JAFFA

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

A single picture inspired my first trip to Tel Aviv. It wasn't a shot of the boardwalk heaving with sun-bronzed roller skaters. Nor was it those gorgeous white Bauhaus buildings brightening up the city's downtown. No, it was an interior shot of The Chapel lounge at The Jaffa, a stained-glass-windowed former convent that British designer John Pawson has turned into an anachronistic masterpiece. It's even more arresting in the flesh: the sweeping ceilings, all powder blue and rimmed with Neoclassical ornaments; the chunky Italian Botolo chairs in mustard velvet; the altar turned bar, clad in marble. This old-meets-new formula informs the hotel's other spaces, too, from the colonnaded walkways around the citrus-scented courtyard, where all-day deli Golda's serves lox bagels and shakshuka, to the timeworn plastered ceilings of my suite in the 19th-century former hospital wing, with a bathroom concealed in a sci-fi-looking mirror box. I found it an apt analogy for the rapid gentrification happening just outside the lobby, where Jaffa, just south of downtown Tel Aviv, has emerged as one of Israel's most envelope-pushing creative hot spots. Legends around this labyrinthine sandstone port town date back to Biblical times. King David and King Solomon once reigned over its cobbled alleys and the prophet Jonah's journey, which ended in a whale's belly, is said to have started from Jaffa's harbour on the Mediterranean Sea. Later on, the town changed hands between Napoleon's troops and British crusaders, until it was finally annexed to Tel Aviv in 1950. Today, new concepts brilliantly meld this storied—and contentious—past with the city's turbo-smart present. The Soho House group sniffed out the 19th-century nunnery behind The Jaffa for its first Israeli outpost, which is now a rendezvous for Tel Aviv's in-crowd, who sip chilli-spiked cocktails around the pool and have sleepovers in the snug, retro-tinged suites pitched up in the building's turrets. Further north, rootsy boutiques and coffee bars such as Dama, a café run by an Israeli-Swedish couple doling out oat-milk flat whites and financier cakes, have moved into the century-old flea market, while the graffiti-scribbled Greek Market across the street turns into an alfresco restaurant hub after sunset. At concept store Hilweh Market, Jaffa-born curator and social-policy maker Adrieh Abou Shehadeh reclaims space for her Palestinian community and stocks the shelves with olive-wood bowls from Bethlehem, glassware from Hebron and jewellery from Arab diaspora designers. Back in The Jaffa's lobby, a welcome haven of air-con breeze, a Damien Hirst spin painting abuts the crumbling remnants of a mediaeval bastion wall, excavated during the hotel's construction. Its shell might be more than 100 years old, but few hotels manage to capture Tel Aviv's current zeitgeist quite so well. CS *Doubles from ₹56,988; marriott.com*

THE DATAI LANGKAWI

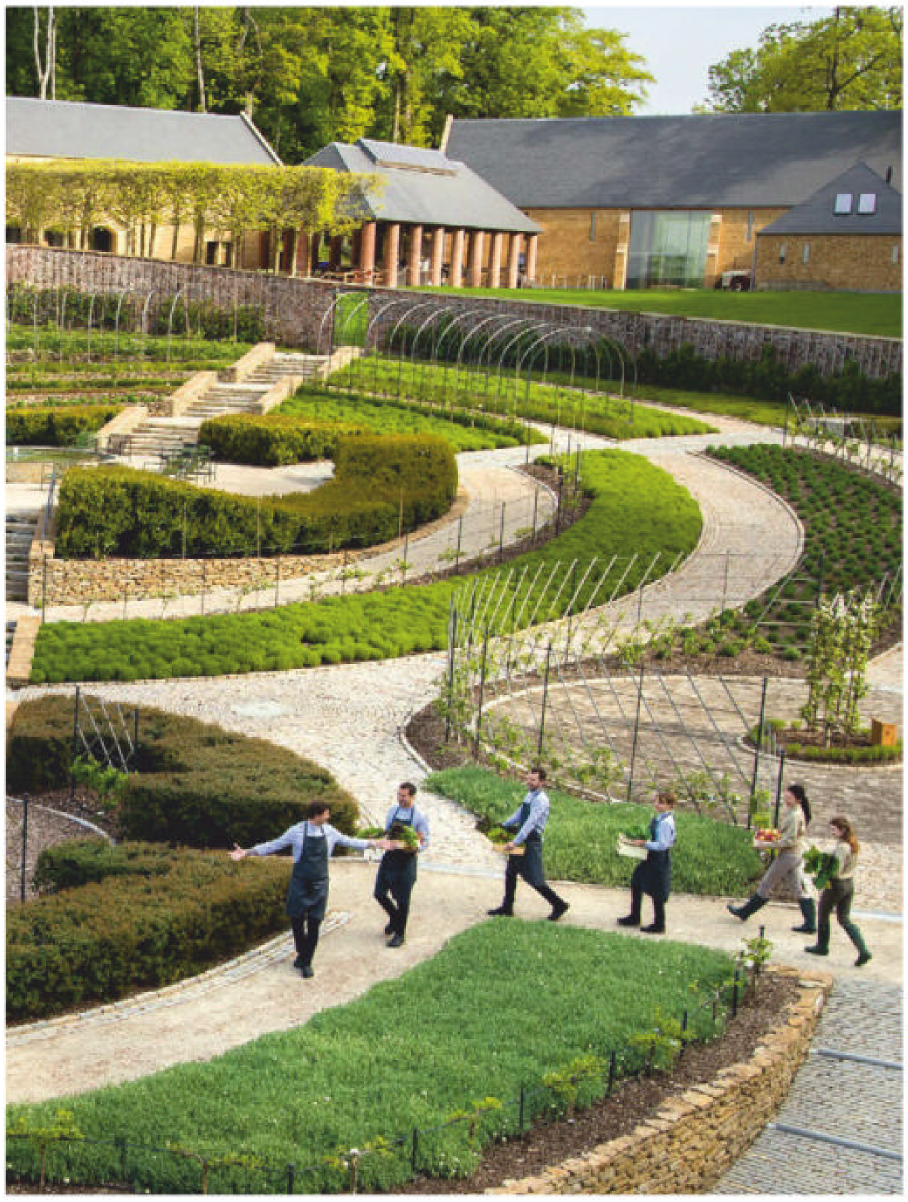
MALAYSIA

The most frequent guest at The Datai, which is now celebrating its 30th year, has clocked up more than 50 visits. Such is the fierce loyalty to this Malaysian mainstay, which sees linen-clad Brits and Hermès-wearing Singaporeans return year after year, often with the next generation of devotees in tow. And even though my own tally isn't nearly as high, I feel a similar affinity to this jungle-fringed island classic every time I saunter down its zig-zagging staircase to the beach. It's the unfussy atmosphere that gets me. Tropic-chic but far from flashy, it's testament to the timelessness of Kerry Hill's designs, even after French architect Didier Lefort zhuzhed up the teakwood-tinged rooms and the hotel added private pools to more of the villas in the rainforest just before the pandemic. The restaurants are a brilliant pick-and-mix of Thai, Indian and Malaysian, spread over breezy thatched-roof pavilions and the poolside Dining Room, where the rootsy degustation menu by chef Chai Chun Boon draws on the hotel's sprawling permaculture garden. The indoor-outdoor spa, pitched up along a babbling stream in the middle of the jungle, never fails to impress, and the new sustainability centre, where I made soap bars from kitchen scraps, is a hoot. But it's the simplest joys I return for: hornbills swooping past my suite, langurs ruffling the foliage overhead and early-morning rainforest expeditions with naturalist Irshad Mobarak. The Datai's back-to-nature thrill never wears off. CS *Doubles from ₹44,381; thedatai.com*

THE NEWT IN SOMERSET

UK

To call The Newt a hotel is a bit like calling Buckingham Palace a house. With gardens worth a visit in their own right, an interactive museum, a corker of a spa plus a gelateria and bakery, it's so much more than 42 beautifully pitched rooms. It even offers bee safaris and honey tastings. You can see why there's been a buzz about this place since its 2019 opening in a corner of Somerset whose cool credentials were already on the rise, thanks to the nearby Hauser & Wirth gallery. Now, a reimagined Roman villa with accompanying museum has been added to the 800-acre estate. Owner and South African billionaire, Koos Bekker, and his wife, Karen Roos, have lavished no-expense-spared attention to detail on the villa.Roos calls her design "classical contemporary", which includes some fun touches: tapestry wall trophies; a room in the colours of a croquet set; a Roman bust wearing a necklace of seashells. Bedrooms vary from contemporary country to Scandinavian simplicity. As at the couple's South African hotel, Babylonstoren, the gardens are the focal point, so it's no surprise that the estate-to-plate food zings with freshness. More unexpected is the Story of Gardening museum where you can visit gardens around the world by VR. The Newt makes its own cider, or "cyder" as it calls it. A tad pretentious? You won't think so when you taste the single varietal brew and see the 300 types of apple tree in the egg-shaped walled garden. JANE KNIGHT *Doubles from ₹52,453; thenewtinsomerset.com*



LE MEURICE

PARIS, FRANCE

Talking point: would Paris hotels be quite so palatial had La Révolution never happened? The Louis XIV vibe—gold leaf and satinate sheen, baroque chairs, and chandeliers—has been so mimicked and dulled by repetition, it's easy to forget how show-stopping it can be. Le Meurice is a reset: Callas at La Scala compared to The Phantom of the Opera of certain other grande dames whose scenery wobbles a little. A piece of immersive theatre where all the details—the greyhound emblem stamped on the butter, the fold of the maître d's silk scarf, the trompe l'oeil fruit by pastry chef Cédric Grolet—are scrupulously choreographed. And yet, for all the marble-lined grandeur, surprisingly cosy and contemporary. Sit amid the Versailles pomp of the Ducasse dining room and you can idly swivel on your Eero Saarinen Tulip chair while waiting for your truffled eggs. On my last stay here, I joined one of the hotel's private art tours, following in the footsteps of Monet and up to the Belle Etoile penthouse for a view almost identical to the painter's 1876 study of The Tuileries. Because, unlike many of the city's palace hotels, this isn't tucked away in a posh enclave but is right in the heart of proper Paris: the Jardin right in front, the main museums spread around. When Art Basel debuted in Paris in October, Le Meurice was the obvious choice for collectors—it's a fully authenticated masterpiece. RICK JORDAN *Doubles from ₹82,704; dorchestercollection.com*

SIX SENSES PUNAKHA

BHUTAN

During a recent epic trip to Bhutan, I was lucky enough to stay in three Six Senses lodges (there are five in total), travelling from Thimphu, with its wooden prayer pavilion and ornamental pools, to the dzong-inspired architecture of Paro. Punakha stood out as the most rustic and intimate. Driving northeast from the capital, over the Dochula Pass and into the warmer Punakha Valley, the landscape shifts from snow-capped peaks and pine trees to lush, terraced rice paddies. It's the wooden afternoon-tea lounge and bar, cantilevering dramatically over the pool, that you see first, with a design inspired by traditional farmhouses. Nineteen suites and villas are split across several buttermilk-yellow buildings, each with mountain or valley views from the balcony. Inside, everything from the furniture to the floors is crafted in Himalayan timber and there's a wood-burning stove to cosy up to after Bhutanese feasts on the restaurant terrace. The brand is known for wellness so, of course, there's a spa: here, the vibe is restorative, which means meditation, yoga nidra, and therapies such as the melatonin-releasing, sleep-inducing shirodhara oil treatment. Equally therapeutic was a guided hike through fields of red chillies and aubergines, climbing up and up to a remote 17th-century temple where we rested in the shady garden. Then there was the exhilarating afternoon white-water rafting along the Mother River before a picnic of rice paper rolls and pomegranate Martinis. Much like the country itself, this is a sanctuary that's immensely good for the soul. EMMA LOVE *Suites from ₹1,55,839; sixsenses.com*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **SIX SENSES HOTELS RESORTS SPAS; MARTIN WESTLAKE**

THE CHEDI MUSCAT

OMAN

On my first visit to The Chedi Muscat in 2004, this refined temple of tranquillity was still a bit of an anomaly. In a Sultanate where five-star hospitality was given to outré displays of rococo-esque glitz, The Chedi had its work cut out appealing to the flamboyant tastes of the Middle Eastern market. Happily, the brand's first foray into the region could not have been more of a triumph. Two decades on, The Chedi has won a legion of loyal fans, both local and international, who come here precisely not to be seen. The lobby alone suggests why. Under its graceful, canopied ceiling (a nod to Oman's Bedouin history), there's silence. This lack of ambient music and general buzz sets the scene for what is to come: an enveloping serenity, where the daily soundtrack is the gentle burble of traditional water features winding though 21 acres of manicured grounds. In its 162 rooms and suites, defined by the restful symmetry of Omani and Asian design, teak and cool linen abound. The peace even filters into the expansive main restaurant, where carved mashrabiya screens lend an air of elegant intimacy. Omani seafood is the main event on menus at all six restaurants, one of which has a bull's-eye view down the sublime 338ft Long Pool. At sunset, torches illuminate the inky Arabian sky where, again, the only sounds are the waves gently breaking on the beach. STELLA ROSATO *Doubles from ₹45,386; ghmhotels.com*

JABALI RIDGE

RUAHA, TANZANIA

The Ruaha National Park is one of those wild gems that safari insiders like to keep to themselves: Tanzania's second-largest protected tract of wilderness, dotted with fat baobabs and hills sprinkled with giant rocks. Among them, atop a kopje overlooking wildlife-rich plains and the seasonal Mwagusi River, this intimate camp is inserted like a modern-day Flintstones home, albeit with one of Africa's prettiest bush pools. The lodge's eight architecturally inventive rooms—some positioned so you can watch passing elephants from your hammock, others perched amid balancing boulders on which cute rock hyraxes sunbathe—are the work of the Cape Town creative Caline Williams-Wynn. Cleverly, she's designed them to be as eco-friendly as they are luxurious: walled with pale floor-to-ceiling shutters that don't obstruct views but do let in the breeze; roofed with shade-giving branches and adorned with sculptural wooden furniture and bush-coloured linens printed with indigenous plants. After a strong massage with local marula oil, guests usually kick off their evening with a herb-infused cocktail as the sun goes down, roll on to a flame-cooked dinner in a lamplit boma and, on certain occasions, end with a moonlit performance by the charismatic staff choir. With passionate young guides and few other guests to share sightings of big cats and rare wild dogs with, plus happy, all-Tanzanian staff who treat each other like family, it's difficult not to fall in love with this wild little place. LG *Doubles from ₹1,57,339; asiliaafrica.com*

CIPRIANI, A BELMOND HOTEL

VENICE, ITALY

The journey is as important as the arrival, they say, and when applied to the home and garden of the Belmond's Cipriani Hotel, it means something. A vintage motor launch in varnished cedar, the last word in 1970s Venetian nautical chic, awaits to whisk you from the terminal or the crowds of St Mark's Square to the hotel, where the charming Roberto, who has been here forever, greets guests with a personal flourish. The Cipriani was custom built in 1958 with plenty of elbow room, on three acres of land of the Giudecca, then owned by Guinness nobility. The daughters, Honor and Brigid, were fans of Harry's Bar, a small panelled den in the heart of Venice, and invited its owner, Giuseppe Cipriani, to think big and create a hotel in partnership with them. The result is a place that is still unrivalled for that spirit of urbane hedonism; for generous and attentive service that never genuflects; for an easy atmosphere of peace and sanctuary alongside a sense of clubhouse discretion and rarefied exclusivity. In the summer, when the canals in Venice get stinkier, the Cipriani offers more than a breath of fresh air. The grounds are large enough for tennis courts, a kitchen garden, vineyard and spa within the orange blossom-scented Casanova garden. They are a haven for birds and Roberta, the tortoise, who, unfortunately, hasn't been seen since a recent acqua alta. Meanwhile, around the showpiece Olympic-sized pool, the beating heart of the hotel (and a happy accident of scale, because the architect got his metres and feet mixed up), sunbathing is raised to the level of theatre, with endless opportunities for people watching around the travertine marble terrace. Here, Hollywood moguls cement film deals in loud voices while Venetian aristocrats settle into cabanas for the day, spraying complimentary Evian like Chanel No 5 and addressing the staff as extensions of their family. Sadly, the barman, Walter Bolzonella, famous for the Buonanotte cocktail he dreamed up with George Clooney, is retired. The capable Riccardo Semeria steps into his shoes, while Riccardo Canella, multi-Michelin superstar chef of Noma fame, takes the culinary helm. He understands that the essence of Italian style is to keep things simple, natural and familiar, yet still fresh and inventive. This is the hallmark of the Cipriani. Others have tried to emulate its timeless Italian chic. But glamour is an atmosphere. It is synonymous with this hotel, with its to-die-for view of Doge's Palace and St Mark's, sequestered on the edge of an insignificant island on a lagoon lapping the Adriatic Sea. CF

Doubles from ₹1,13,980; belmond.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: **HELEN CATHCART; GREG FUNNELL/ASILIA AFRICA; VICTOR ROMERO**

THE GORING HOTEL

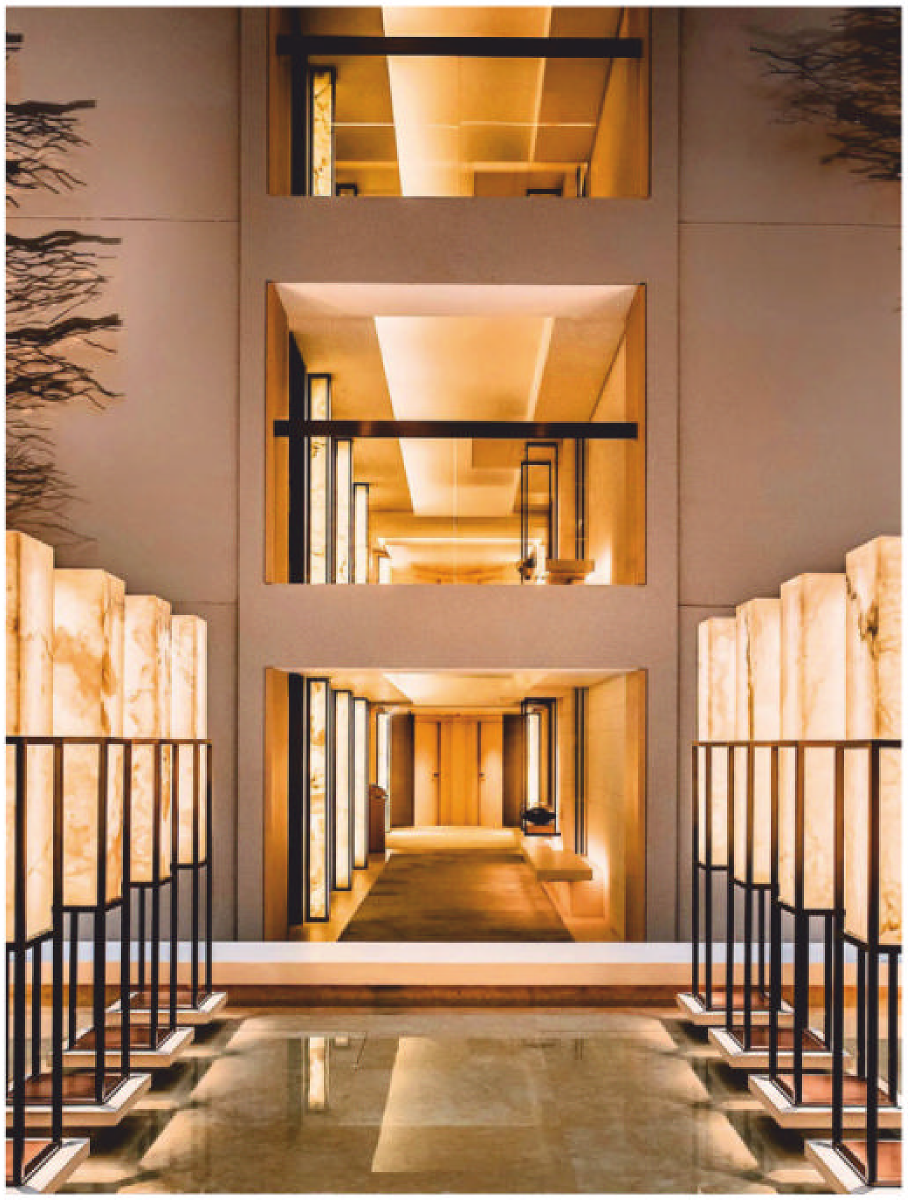
LONDON, UK

The Goring is London to its very core. And unlike so many of its fellow luxury hotels with their slick, inoffensively international feel, it really couldn't be anywhere else. From the scarlet-coated concierges to the antique-filled rooms, proximity to Buckingham Palace, and a dining room that was a favourite of both Mrs Thatcher and the Queen Mother, this is a true icon of the capital's hotel scene. But it's very much traditional rather than old-fashioned, and under that classic hood purrs an exceptionally modern engine. Beds are supremely comfortable and towels lusciously thick, while the bathrooms have vast walk-in showers and tubs big enough to host your own regatta. Service is smiling but very professional. Discretion is everything: who knows how many coups, plots and leadership bids have been quietly hatched in The Goring Cocktail Bar, which happens to mix one of the finest Martinis in town? CEO Jeremy Goring is the fourth generation of his family to take the reins, and this avid surfer makes sure things never become too stuffy. In the summer, a rum bar pops up in the garden, and things get very merry indeed. The Dining Room is a bastion of traditional, British food: oeufs Drumkilbo, rack of Romney lamb, Longhorn beef Wellington, and the restaurant's legendary lobster omelette. TOM PARKER BOWLES *Doubles from ₹57,000; thegoring.com*

THE UPPER HOUSE

HONG KONG

For decades, no other city in Asia could hold a candle to Hong Kong, with its camphor-covered mountains and twinkling harbour, cloud-piercing skyscrapers and smoky little temples, fish-on-a-stick food stalls and glamorous Michelin-starred restaurants. But my hometown has had a difficult few years. Since the crackdown following the pro-democracy protests of 2019, there's been an exodus of more than 2,50,000 Hongkongers. Covid-19 then closed the border for 31 months until October 2022, bringing tourism to its knees. Mid-pandemic, I checked into The Upper House in Admiralty, which had used the corona downtime for a discreet nip and tuck. My one-bedroom, 48th-floor suite was put together by Hong Kong native André Fu, who designed the hotel when it opened 13 years ago. Four times the size of my apartment, it has dazzling harbour and mountain views. Amid the smoky taupes, mineral blues, and blond woods were extracts from Fu's Living Collection: de Gournay wallpaper, creamy contemporary Tai Ping rugs and brush-gilded porcelain crockery for the 18-seat dining table. From my spa suite, I could see The Peak. Upstairs, the new restaurant, Salisterra, is an earth-toned Mediterranean affair serving seasonal dishes such as velvety artichoke velouté with slow-cooked egg, lemony seafood linguini and pear tart smeared with Chantilly cream. The turmoil of the last few years hasn't changed this place. LEE COBAJ *Doubles from ₹44,389; thehousecollective.com*



GRAND HOTEL TREMEZZO

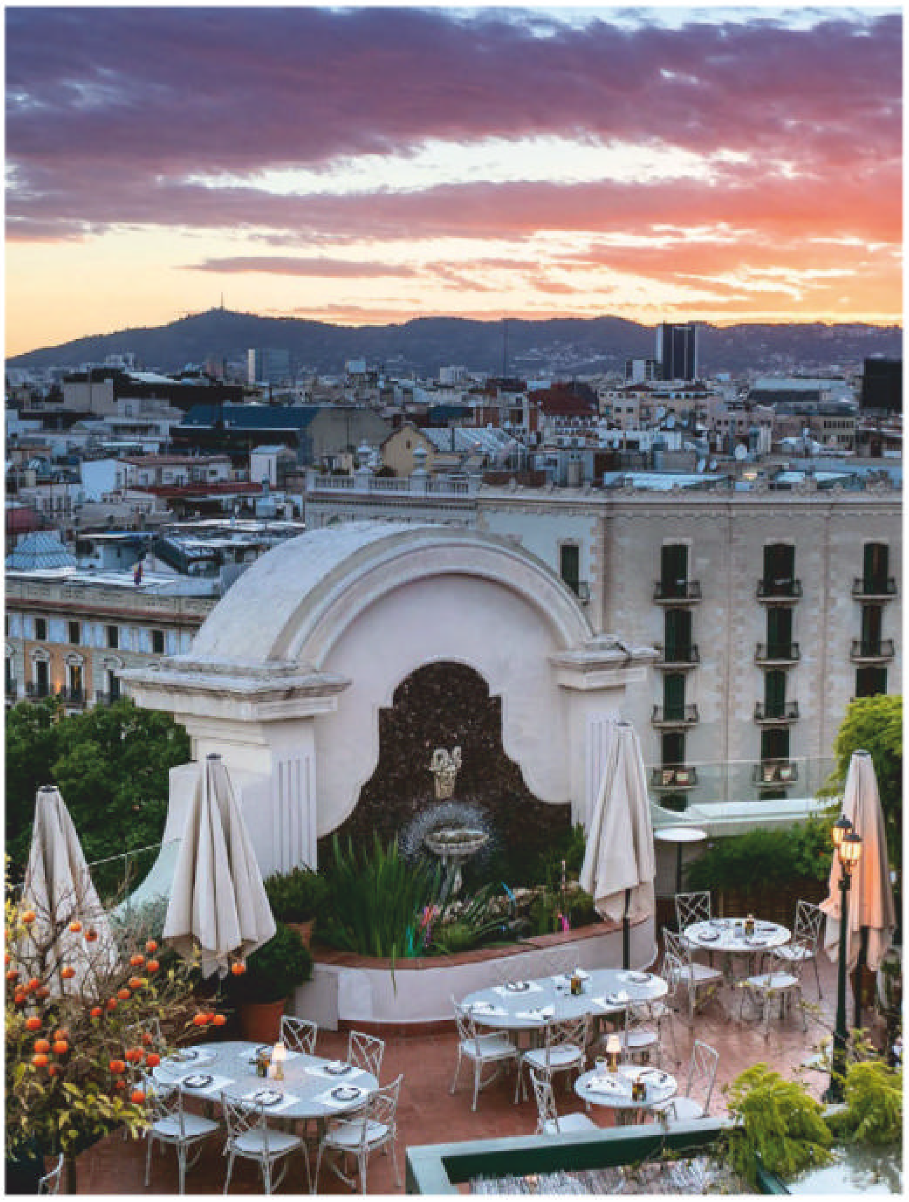
COMO, ITALY

In an increasingly rapacious Italian hotel scene, some iconic family-owned properties retain that made-in-Italy, one-of-a-kind elixir that the bigger players can only dream of. The decadent Grand Hotel Tremezzo is decidedly one of these: it has been in family hands since opening in 1910 and comes with Grand Tour charm in spades. Sitting a little back from Lake Como, looking out onto Bellagio, the Liberty-style building conjures a Grand Budapest Hotel set, an impression that grows on entering the formal lobby with its sweeping red-carpet staircase, antique gilt-framed mirrors and marble-encased bathrooms. I also love the flowers in abundance all over the property. But the hotel still manages to feel intimate, thanks to its smaller cosy spaces: a cocooning spa with a heated swim-in, swim-out pool and Santa Maria Novella products; an outdoor pool surrounded by a forest of trees and blooming flowers; and tucked-away bars, and corner banquettes in the restaurant (be sure to try the gold-leaf risotto). The hotel effortlessly pulls multiple punches, with a covetable shop stocking brands like Bric's Milano, Borsalino and Chez Dede, and a beautiful vintage wooden boat for lake excursions and to avoid road traffic. But the true pièce de résistance is the floating pool sitting on the lake—cinematic grandeur incarnate with a Lido-like beachfront, bright orange and white umbrellas and chic custom loungers. ONDINE COHANE *Doubles from ₹65,587; grandhoteltremezzo.com*

EL PALACE BARCELONA

SPAIN

I've been coming to Barcelona since just before the 1992 Olympics, that watershed moment when the city picked up the baton and ran with it. Since then, I have always been swayed by the new: staying in Hotel Arts Barcelona when it rose up on the beachfront or making for The Hoxton's rooftop taqueria. However, El Palace, like the Eixample district it sits in, is never ruffled by arrivistes. Locals still call it "El Ritz"—it was César Ritz's last grand project—and while it officially lost the name decades ago, it clung to the theatrical pomp. The lobby's basalt-black columns are the definition of mausoleum chic, as if ready to stage a production of Salome. Like all grande dames, it gives good gossip and drops a few names. Everyone knows that Dalí lived here and once asked the staff to bring a giant stuffed horse that he'd bought up the stairs to his room, but there's also a wild rumour that Trotsky's murderer, Ramón Mercader, was once maître d' here. I returned to Barcelona earlier this year, the first time since lockdown, to find it almost completely awake once more, and the El Palace full of renewed zip. A new name has set up home here: Rafa Zafra, the top-knotted former head chef at El Bulli, in Amar, a midnight-blue restaurant with ponzu oysters, caviar, and spider-crab cannelloni on the menu. And the rooftop pool terrace has been reclaimed by summer DJ sets and cocktail-fuelled art lessons. I even danced the merengue—seasoned boulevardiers can learn new moves, too. RJ *Doubles from ₹29,263; hotelpalacebarcelona.com*



PHOTOGRAPHS: **PIERRE AUGIER; KASIA GATKOWSKA; SIM PHOTOGRAPHY; JOE THOMAS**

Breakfast
MENU
Icelandic Pancakes
Eggs & Bacon
Huevos Rancheros
Chia Pudding
Porrid

PHOTOGRAPHS: OIVIND HAUG

DEPLAR FARM

ICELAND

Some places defy the whole notion of what a hotel is. Deplar Farm—a turf-roofed former farm in a lonely valley on northern Iceland's Troll Peninsula, where sheep outnumber people—is one of those. It lingers in the memory as a series of sensations: the shuddering tingle of the icy plunge pool after 15 minutes meditating in a 100-degree sauna; the sight of ephemeral wavespray against the pinkish early-morning light on a sea kayak trip among the seals and silence; the shimmering, blissful half-sleep of a sound bath, in a little candle-lit room where the singing bowls and sonorous gongs seem to rearrange my subconscious. On a recent late October visit, snow-capped glacial mountains loom constantly, unmoved by the slow shifting of the high-definition Arctic light. Though it looks like just another black timber farmstead on the drive up the valley, the 32-guest lodge is a deceptively large, glassy lair of pure-grade hedonism. It is not just that every mid-century chair demands to be touched and sat upon, but that there are tactile invitations to play everywhere: a silver table football set and a grey-gauze pool table in the double-height bar, with its full band setup on the mezzanine; a shuffleboard table in the cosy snug, with its hidden games consoles and movie projector. With a certain sort of grown-up comfort music gently bleeding at all times—Led Zeppelin, Alt-J, Fleetwood Mac—this is the kind of place where frazzled bigwigs return to their inner children, aided by sacred privacy and edge-finding adventures, from heli-skiing in the surrounding mountains to surfing empty line-ups on the edge of the Skagafjörðu and fly-fishing for char or trout in the nearby lakes.

The whole concept of the 11-lodge brand is that everything is "turned up to 11", in the Spinal Tap parlance, including the nightly locavore set menus at a communal table here. At times, the luxury borders on comical: as we're wafting from the indoor hot bath to the steaming outdoor one, looking down the valley towards the sea, one of the team appears in the sunken, Hobbit-like swim-up bar, wondering if we'd like the same Negronis as last night. The cosmopolitan staff offer down-to-earth friendliness rather than anything like obsequiousness, and seem to be having a blast, too. We are on horseback in the late-morning sun when Beda Mörgeli, a thick-bearded Swiss-born sea and adventure guide, tells me, unprompted but very convincingly, "Damn, I love my job". Others appear like apparitions, including Eric Martellozzo, an Italian yogi with soft brown eyes, who leads our Viking Sauna Ritual and that earth-shaking gong bath with an intense tenderness. His peacefulness is the overriding feeling that we leave with. We drive away on the single-track road like happy, goosebumped children, made small and fresh again by the cold silent valley. TOBY SKINNER *Doubles from about ₹2,98,170; elevenexperience.com*

THE MARK

NEW YORK, USA

I'm not a fan of the term staycation but I certainly enjoy the concept. And a delight of living in New York is that hotels here easily double as portholes of escape from my day-to-day existence in Brooklyn. Checking into The Mark, elegantly occupying a block between Fifth and Madison avenues close to Central Park, is like unlocking the door to my secret pied-à-terre on the Upper East Side. Here, tidy bundles of clipped white roses spruce up my dressing table and the bathtub is a reliable four inches deeper than any I'd likely have at home. Those familiar with the work of French interiors master Jacques Grange will recognise his trademark restraint here. What The Mark lacks in ostentation it makes up for in subtle, glowing sophistication, from the tiled floor in the very discreet lobby to the sparse hallways that dimly light the way to each pale blue door, with just the right splashes of commissioned art displayed throughout. Then there are those classic New York touchpoints, but fancied up a notch: the hot-dog stand with a menu designed by Jean-Georges Vongerichten, and picnic baskets for Central Park delivered via pedicab and set up under oak trees with loungers and blankets. The Mark's calling card is how successfully it transports guests into an elegant version of that very distinct style of life in New York, one that people travel from all over the world to get a taste of. And, for a lucky few, it's just a subway ride away. EF
Doubles from ₹1,09,427; themarkhotel.com

KYRIMAI

MANI, GREECE

Down in deepest Mani, the middle tentacle of the Peloponnese, there's nothing for miles save for the occasional road lined with shrines, or fields full of chest-high thistles; here and there, old stone towers stab the sky. In one such place, Gerolimenas, on the far southwestern shore, Kyrimai hotel has occupied a 19th-century tower house for some 20 years. Originally built by the family who run the establishment, it's perfect as far as conversions go: immaculate and indulgent, yet retaining the deep romance of a place so remote it might have been overgrown with brambles only a week ago. It's a maze of arches and stairways, the rooms inside the thick stone walls often split on two levels, with beds wearing white linen tucked in the eaves. Yet nothing feels cave-like. Instead, sunshine spreads beyond the windows and shutters into the amber-coloured walls and along hefty wooden floors. A restaurant sits above clear water in which fish curl and loll towards the shadows. It's impossible not to step off repeatedly for a swim. There's usually someone doing laps around the bay, or the sound of a creaking boat resounding off thyme-scented cliffs. In spring, the high rocks can turn light blue with wild sage that also appears in the house cocktails. The food is the best in the region: sardines with black olives whose spicy freshness cuts through the fatty fish oil, and rock samphire that turns creamed feta from a salty Greek chore into something paradisiacal. ANTONIA QUIRKE *Doubles from ₹13,113; kyrimai.gr*

MANDARIN ORIENTAL

BANGKOK, THAILAND

On my last visit to the Mandarin Oriental Bangkok, I ended up chatting to a family of Thai tuna-fish billionaires over plates of sushi at kaiseki restaurant Kinu by Takagi. A few months before, I gave Russell Crowe a big smile and a nod in the corridor thinking his face looked familiar—an old neighbour? Then there was the time I was upgraded to the glorious ivory and jade-green John le Carré suite and spent most of my time in a bathrobe watching long-tails, tankers and rice barges zig-zagging along the Chao Phraya River, imagining myself to be a real writer. And the weekend I fell in with the right kind of wrong crowd while listening to jazz at the hotel's shadowy little Bamboo Bar and arrived "home" just in time for what I rate as the world's best breakfast: mountains of tropical fruit and silky eggs Benedict served under stripy canopies on the hotel's rambling waterfront terrace. The spa is my happy place and I love people-watching in the lobby, where the ladies wear jewels so big they have to be real. The world's best hotels aren't just beautifully designed, meticulously staffed and flush with facilities—the 146-year-old Mandarin Oriental Bangkok is all of these things—they are also places infused with a sense of fun, an anything-might-happen frisson. I simply don't feel like I've been to Bangkok unless I've had at least one night soaking up the good life at the Mandarin Oriental. LC *Doubles from ₹46,387; mandarinoriental.com*

PUMPHOUSE POINT

TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

The process of disconnection—from Wi-Fi, everyday cares, reality—begins on the drive deep into Tasmania's UNESCO World Heritage-listed wilderness. Pumphouse Point lies within a national park that protects some of the rarest forest on earth: mossy, misty and mysterious, a precious tract of cool-temperate rainforest filled with variants of species dating from the epoch before the island drifted from the Australian mainland. This lost-in-time forest frames moody Lake St. Clair and the incongruous Art Deco lines of a former hydroelectric pump station marooned offshore. Nineteen rooms and suites have low-key interiors of industrial-style lighting and plumbing. Six are tucked into the Shorehouse, a converted substation; nearly all the others are in the three-storey Pumphouse, connected to land by a 787-foot flume jetty. The pick of the suites is The Retreat, a very private love shack featuring Tasmanian-designed and handcrafted furniture and ceramics. Guests head to a new glass- and wood-lined "pod" set in a eucalyptus forest for meditation and yoga. They assemble picnics from in-room larders, explore forest trails on foot or e-bike and take rowboats to spot platypuses. Wholesome communal breakfasts and dinners are served in the Shorehouse's glass-walled dining room, with wallabies and the occasional wombat family grazing in view. HELEN ANDERSON *Doubles from ₹31,260; pumphousepoint.com.au*

PHOTOGRAPHS: **SCOTT FRANCES; EDVINAS BRUZAS; CHRIS SCHALKX; KATHY VAN DULLEMEN**

GREEN SHOOTS

ON A TRIP TO MOROCCO'S ANTI-ATLAS MOUNTAINS TO TRACE HIS JEWISH HERITAGE, SAKI KNAFO UNTANGLES DETAILS OF THE PAST AND PLANTS NEW SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

حلاق
COIFFEUR

PHOTOGRAPHS: **DAVID EDWARDS; MATTHIEU SALVAING**

ONE OF THE FIRST STORIES I remember is the one my father used to tell me about our family's origins. On our couch in Brooklyn, my dad explained that it began with my "great-great-great-great" grandfather, who lived in the Anti-Atlas mountains of southern Morocco. One day, all of the Jewish men in the village were ordered to convert (in my father's strange phrase) "on the pain of death". They refused. Fifty of them were burned alive in a bonfire. Our forefather, Maklouf, and his grown sons were among them, but his wife, whose name has been lost to time, fled the village with her baby boy. After weeks of trekking across the harsh terrain that stretched from the mountains down to the coast, she somehow reached the gates of her hometown, Essaouira, a walled port city at the crossroads of the great trading routes of the Atlantic and the Sahara.

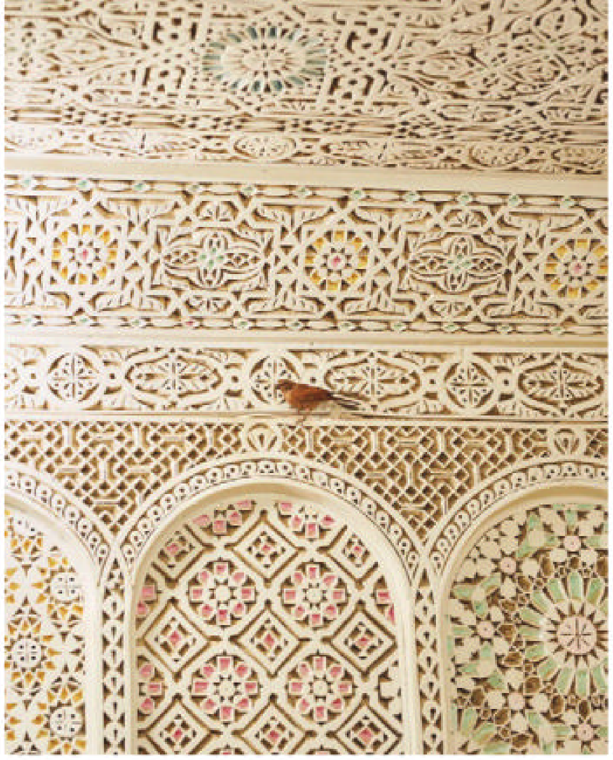
In time, she recounted the saga to her son, Moshe, who grew up to become a scribe remembered for his beautiful handwriting. He, in turn, told it to his son, Yosef, a rabbinical scholar known for both his height and his humility; and Yosef told it to his son, David, a rabbi admired for his fairness as an arbiter of disputes, and David told it to his son, Isaac, a painter, writer and raconteur who memorised the poems of Cyrano de Bergerac and Victor Hugo. Isaac told it to my father, Hai, a conceptual artist who drove a cab in New York before landing a job as a renderer of pointillist pen-and-ink portraits for *The Wall Street Journal.*

One morning last May, my wife and our one-year-old daughter went for a dip in the pool at our resort in the beach town of Agadir while I set off for the place where it all began. As a kid, I had never imagined that the village of Oufrane Atlas Saghir was a location you could actually visit. And yet, there I was, heading south on the road that leads into the rugged Anti-Atlas.

Sitting beside me was my father's cousin Régine, a retired accountant, in a glittery blouse and hexagonal sunglasses studded with rhinestones. At 87, she still travels alone and, until a few years ago, drank red wine every

Road carved through the mountains. Opposite page, clockwise from left: **flora at Dar al Hossoun; intricate souk interior; tea time in the Atlas mountains; Dar al Hossoun seating area; horse in the Atlas.** Previous pages, from left: **pool at Dar al Hossoun, Taroudant; reflection of Moorish architecture, Morocco**

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID EDWARDS; MATTHIEU SALVAING; SOPHIA VAN DEN HOEK



night before a tooth infection forced her to switch to beer. Although she left Morocco for Paris when she was 20, she had been back to visit many times. When she heard about my plans to travel to Oufrane, she declared that she would be coming along. Now, she was looking out the window at the expanse of arid hills dotted with scrub. "Magnifique!" she exclaimed. "Incroyable!"

After four hours, we arrived at our destination, a cluster of boxy houses surrounded by barren brown slopes. A man in a white turban and a blue kaftan met us by the roadside and introduced himself as the guardian of the Jewish cemetery. He led us on a hike up a dry riverbed outside town. We climbed up the riverbank and came to a shoulder-high wall. The guardian unlocked a metal door with an old-fashioned key. A field of jagged, copper-brown stones sprawled before us. Looking closely, we could see that some of the stones had Hebrew letters carved into them. Régine hobbled from one to another, wiping dust from the letters with a tissue, but as far as she could tell, none of them said Knafo.

"IN THE 1940S, THERE WERE A QUARTER OF A MILLION JEWS HERE. THEY WERE MERCHANTS AND FARMERS AND LEATHER WORKERS, INEXTRICABLY WOVEN INTO THE MOROCCAN CULTURE"

There are a few thousand Jews living in Morocco now. In the 1940s, there were a quarter of a million. They were merchants and farmers and leather workers. They knotted carpets, fashioned ornate silver jewellery and played Andalusian orchestral music. They were inextricably woven into the fabric of Moroccan culture and society. Then, in the two decades following Morocco's independence from France in 1956, almost all of them left.

There is no single answer as to why. The Zionist movement had something to do with it. So did the promise of economic opportunity in Canada and France. One thing that is clear is they haven't been forgotten. Throughout the trip, I kept meeting people who seemed nostalgic for the days when the Jews were around. One guy pointed to a hole in the ground that used to be a spring. The water dried up, he claimed, when the Jews went away. Others insisted that the Jews had lived in blissful harmony with their Muslim neighbours—"like brothers". I would have liked to believe this, but I had my doubts. Granted, what happened to our forefather and his sons in Oufrane was, by all accounts, an aberration: Jews generally fared better in Morocco than in other Muslim countries and, for most of history, they fared far better in Muslim countries than in Europe. Still, under the Muslim dynasties that ruled Morocco for more than a thousand years before the French took over, Jews didn't have the same rights and freedoms as Muslims. And although the French colonial government eventually accorded

Clockwise from left: **fruit stall; oranges in Taroudant; doorstep in Anza, near Agadir; Atlas Mountains; bedroom at Dar al Hossoun.** Opposite: **street life in Taroudant**

PHOTOGRAPHS: **MATTHIEU SALVAING; ANDREA SWARZ; SOPHIA VAN DEN HOEK**

special privileges to some Jews, it only deepened divisions between them and fellow Moroccans (which may have been the goal). The establishment of Israel in 1948 drove the wedge deeper.

I WAS THINKING ABOUT all this, trying to reconcile the rosy narrative people painted for me with the darker stories I'd heard all my life, when my family and I arrived in Taroudant, a city cradled in the alluvial basin between the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas ranges, some 50 miles inland from Agadir. The turreted walls wrapped around the town reflected the afternoon sun's glow. They'd been standing since the 16th century, when they were built to keep out Portuguese invaders. Today, they attract tourists, though not too many.

I'd come to Taroudant because I'd read that it was a stronghold of Amazigh culture. The Amazigh or "Berber" people—the term *Berber*, an exonym, comes from the same Latin root as barbarian—are the Indigenous people of North Africa. According to local tradition, many of the Jews who used to live in the mountains of Morocco descended from Amazigh tribes that converted to Judaism as far back as 2,500 years ago, when Phoenician conquerors made their way across the North African coast, possibly with some Israelites in their boats. Arab soldiers swept through the region centuries later, overcoming fierce Amazigh resistance. Today, Morocco is generally thought of as an Arab country, but its rulers never fully succeeded in suppressing the Amazigh language and culture.

That night, we stayed at Dar al Hossoun, a hotel set amid the olive groves outside the city walls. Its modern-rustic buildings of wood and baked earth overlooked an extraordinary botanical garden bursting with desert plants from around the world—cacti, agaves, kalanchoes, aloes, euphorbias. It had originally served as the home of Eric Ossart and Arnaud Maurières, landscape architects from France who had come to Taroudant to work for Farah Diba Pahlavi, the widow of the last Shah of Iran. Sitting in the hotel garden that evening, I had a long conversation with an Amazigh guy who worked there, a soft-spoken young man named Marouane. After I recounted my family's history in Oufrane, he revealed that his family had a story that was almost a mirror image of ours. According to their oral history, they had once been Jewish. Around the same time that my ancestor and his sons chose death over conversion, his ancestors, sensibly enough, chose survival. Many Amazigh people had stories like that, he told me. One result, he said, was that Amazigh people felt a strong sense of kinship with Jews. After all, if these stories were true, we had once all been related.

Marouane did not try to convince me that Jews had always been happy there. Amazigh Muslims had endured discrimination and oppression, too. But he noted that the restrictions placed on Jews had been enforced most strictly in big cities, where powerful elites held sway. In the Amazigh hinterlands, where the grip of the authorities was relatively weak, Jews and Muslims lived in close harmony. Reading up on the Jews of Oufrane, I learned something that I didn't remember ever hearing before. According to *Jewish Morocco* by the historian Emily Gottreich, 10 Jewish villagers were saved from the bonfire by their Muslim neighbours.

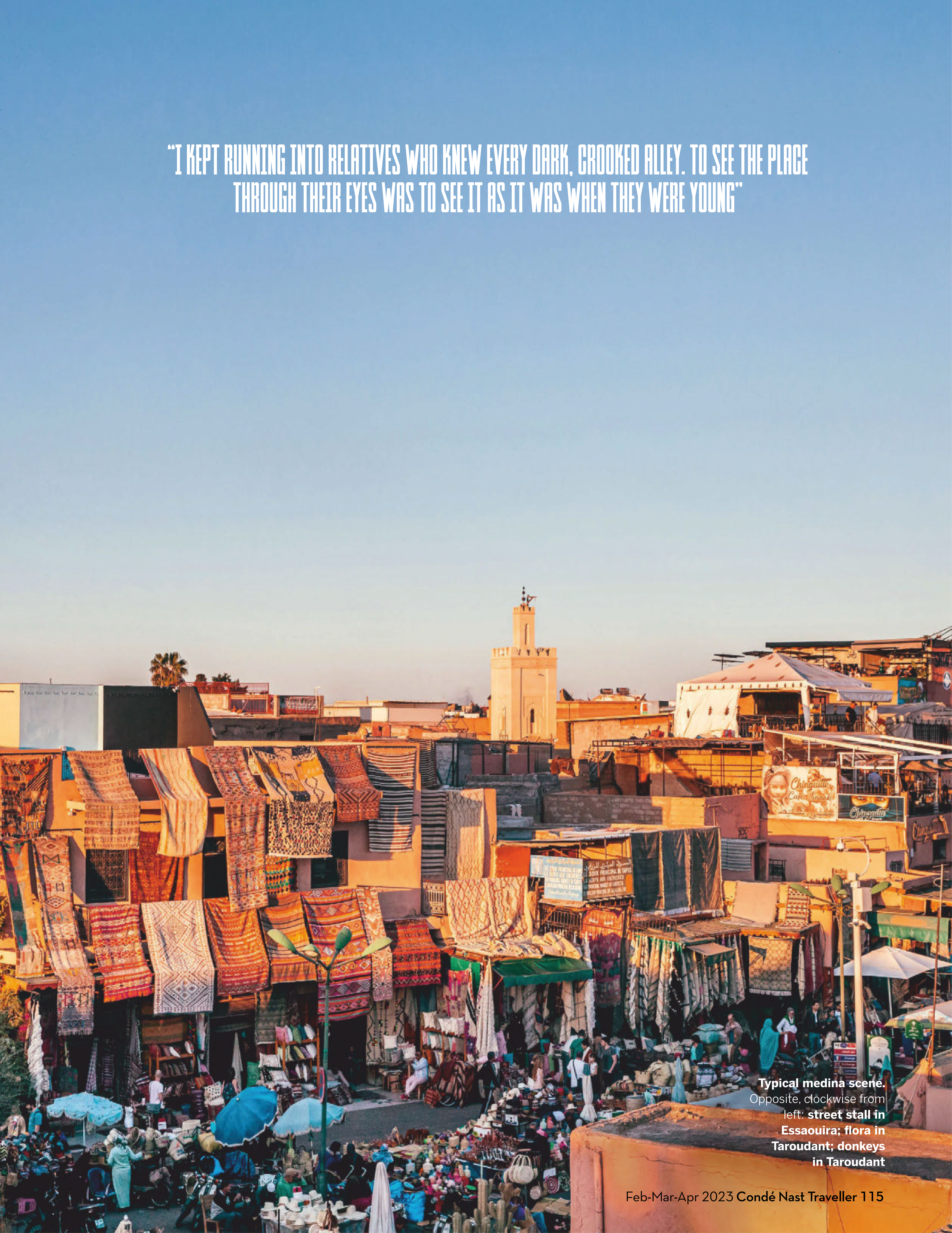
MY FATHER'S HOMETOWN, Essaouira, was built on a tongue of land that sticks out into the Atlantic. A sandy beach stretches along one side, bending towards a harbour filled with blue fishing skiffs. On the other side, Portuguese cannons poke out from the citadel walls, and surf slams into the rocks below. As happy as I was to arrive there, I thought about how much happier my great-great-great-grandmother must have been. I'd spent the last few hours in a luxury van, my baby in a car seat next to me; she'd spent weeks carrying a baby on her back through the desert, subsisting on carab.

We were in Essaouira to celebrate my father's 75th birthday. He had left Morocco in 1956, when he was nine, and had only been back once, when he was 63. In some ways, that trip had depressed him. The old white buildings had looked more or less the same as he'd remembered them, but all of the people who had crowded his memories were gone.

This visit would be a little different. At some point while we were planning it, he had told me that Régine and maybe a few other relatives would be joining us. "A few" quickly turned into 20. Régine is one of 13 siblings, 11 of whom are still alive. Improbably, they all get along, which makes for very large gatherings. (Their annual Seder in Israel draws 300 people.) Walking around the city with my wife and baby, I kept running into relatives who had come to town for the event. They knew every street, every dark, crooked alley. To see the place through their eyes was to see it as it was when they were young. There was the Jewish club that my grandfather established just a few years before the Jews began to leave. And there was my long-dead grandfather in a suit and tie, serving cocktails in glasses he had imported from France for way more than he could afford. And there was Régine, young and radiant, singing in the choir he directed, a backdrop of painted roses hanging behind her. And there was my grandmother, her dark hair swept up into a crown, scolding my grandfather for painting it on one of their bedsheets.

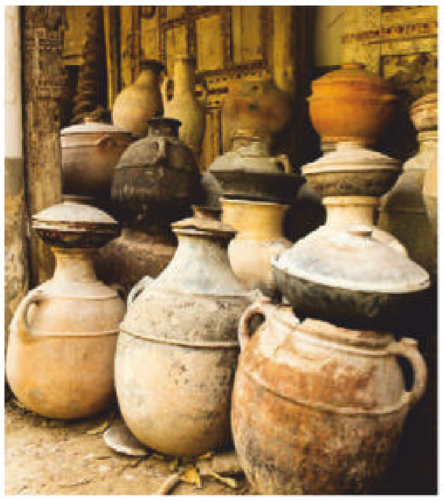
One day, I was wandering through the medina, unsure of where I was, when I passed Bayt Dakira—House of Memory—a new museum and cultural centre dedicated to preserving the history of the Jews of Essaouira and promoting Jewish-Muslim relations. Under King Mohammed VI, the country had been making an effort to honour its Jewish heritage and this building was part of it. Peering into the lobby from the street, I saw a familiar face looking back at me, ghost-like, from a blown-up old photograph hanging on the wall. The man had a squarish white beard and a dark sasia, or

PHOTOGRAPHS: ELISE HASSEY; MATTHIEU SALVAING



“I KEPT RUNNING INTO RELATIVES WHO KNEW EVERY DARK, CROOKED ALLEY. TO SEE THE PLACE THROUGH THEIR EYES WAS TO SEE IT AS IT WAS WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG”

Typical medina scene. Opposite, clockwise from left: **street stall in Essaouira; flora in Taroudant; donkeys in Taroudant**



Clockwise from left: **Essaouira seafront; antique urns; carpet sellers in Taroudant; Valley of the Cedars in the Anti-Atlas; chicken tagine lunch.** Opposite: **medina life**

skull cap, and his eyes were like my father's—soft and a little sad, with the eyelids drooping in the outer corners. It took me a moment to realise I was looking at my great-grandfather, the esteemed Rabbi David Knafo.

The next day, for my father's birthday lunch, we gathered in a mosaic-lined hall donated by one of Régine's friends. There were plates of fish tagine and fried sardines. Little dishes of beets and spicy carrots and harissa. Some of my relatives prayed before the meal. Although I'm not religious, I found myself reflecting, as I often have, on Maklouf's decision to die for his faith. Why did each successive generation persist in telling that story? Did they tell it because they wanted their descendants to be as religious as he was? Because they wanted us to know our people had been oppressed? Because they were proud that our patriarch had refused to kneel to an oppressor? Or was it a story about a woman's strength and perseverance? If so, why hadn't we recorded her name? And what about the 10 Jewish villagers who had reportedly been rescued by their Muslim neighbours? Why hadn't I ever heard that part of the story before?

My father was sitting in the middle of a long table laden with bottles of wine and mahia, a Moroccan-Jewish fig spirit, laughing with his cousins and sister over something that happened long ago. A few seats away, my daughter sat in my mother's lap, eating bits of aubergine, smiling and babbling. Earlier in the trip, my father had wistfully pointed out that she would remember none of it. I'd told him not to worry—I would tell her the story.

Where to go along Morocco's central coast

TAROUDANT An hour-and-a-half inland from Agadir, Taroudant is a gateway to the snow-capped High Atlas. Within its rammed-earth walls, souks teem with healers, musicians and nomadic rug sellers. Often seen as a smaller, less touristy Marrakech, the city has smart riads, including the charming four-bedroom **Dar Louisa**, with curios around a verdant courtyard. Its feted designers, Eric Ossart and Arnaud Mauriéres, are also behind **Dar al Hossoun**, the beloved eco-bolthole just outside town, with baked-earth villas and long slender pools spread among gardens frequented by peacocks and vocal frogs.

TAGHAZOUT AND IMSOUANE Half-an-hour up the coast from Agadir, the waves pump hardest between Taghazout and Imsouane, another hour north. There's a glut of new development at Taghazout Bay, where **Fairmont** brought Africa's largest spa. Things are saltier in the mural-adorned town, with smart stays, including the driftwood-chic, labyrinthine **Munga Guesthouse** and **Amouage**, an angular place of tropical vibes from British surf-camp pioneers Surf Maroc. More energy is moving to slower Imsouane, where the scent of kif hashish drifts across the pastel-pink lighthouse. In-the-know surfers still head for The O Experience's **Tayourt Lodge**, with its verandas overlooking the Atlantic.

ESSAOUIRA A few hours' drive from Imsouane, this weathered blue-tone city of fishing skiffs and Portuguese cannons poking from citadel walls (recognizable as Astapor in *Game Of Thrones*) feels like the place that inspired Jimi Hendrix to write "Purple Haze". Stays run the gamut from the **Chill Art Hostel**, a bright backpacker riad that's been around since the 1970s, to the more refined ones like **Jardin des Douars**, a kasbah-inspired spa hotel overlooking the Ksob River, and L'Heure Bleue Palais, a classic 19th-century triad next to the Bab Marrakech bastion.

THE DETAILS Artisans of Leisure offers bespoke tours from from £7,100 (₹7,21,436) per person, including stays at luxury hotels, a private guide and driver. *artisansofleisure.com.*

PHOTOGRAPHS: ELISE HASSEY; CATHERINE MEAD; MATTHIEU SALVAING

THE BEST VILLAS

For the best stay in Sri Lanka, take over one of these sprawling houses set

IN SRI LANKA

within the most beautiful surrounds. By **Harriet Compston**

PHOTOGRAPH: **MO ARPI**

Sri Lanka is bouncing back. After a rocky patch last year, this island nation is shining with renewed spirit. Nowhere is this more evident than along the southern coast, with its golden beaches and glassy azure waters. Beach bars line the sand, thronging with conversation, smoothies, and poke bowls, and shopaholics are spoilt for choice at Galle's chic boutiques. The big question, however, remains: where to bed down?

While five-star hotel groups put on an excellent show, there is an abundance of overwhelmingly good villas to rent on Sri Lanka's southern stretch of coastline. The villa scene has recently really upped its game with new design-led properties being built from scratch, long-term favourites having a refresh, and big-name, super stylish houses hitting the rental market for the first time.

Many of the prettiest villas circle Galle, with its colonial charm and crumbling Dutch architecture, but there are equally lovely places to rent an hour or so away. The beach town of Bentota, with its Geoffrey Bawa architecture, is fantastic for design aficionados. Or, further south, there's little-known Tangalle which offers a string of tranquil shores. But it's not just about the beach. Some of the finest villas are tucked away inland, hidden among the palms.

Such a wide range of villas means an astonishing choice for visitors, but it has also prompted owners, a mix of passionate expats and forward-thinking locals, to bring originality to the table. Today, there's a villa to suit everyone—be it a petite family hideaway amid a verdant rice paddy, an all-out contemporary party pad in the hills, or a jaw-dropping beach retreat to take over as your own—all with your own pool and team of unobtrusive staff.

And when it comes to food, the villas jostle to come out on top. Some boast internationally trained chefs knocking out Michelin-star-worthy European dishes, others feature brilliant local home cooks who conjure up superb rice and curry with produce freshly plucked from the garden. While it's tempting to just loll around the villas, head out. Plenty of adventure awaits on the south coast. Alongside the golden beaches, there are Buddhist temples, colourful markets, and cinnamon plantations to explore. Then return to the total utter privacy of your villa, which, coupled with Sri Lanka's beguiling beauty, is pretty hard to beat.

MALIGA KANDA

BEST FOR: THOSE WHO WANT A BIT OF EVERYTHING

A short drive inland from Galle, next door to a Buddhist temple, arriving here is like stumbling onto a Hollywood film set. It's got an epic pool party kind of vibe yet is tucked away above a rainforest with swinging monkeys. The 15-year-old villa was snapped up three years ago by regular guests, Dutch couple Maurien and Maarten Wetselaar. Today—with no expense spared—they are injecting a new energy into the house on a big scale.

More a boutique hotel than a villa, there's a flurry of attentive staff and a mass of things to do. The seven chalky-white en-suite bedrooms have The-Princess-and-the-Pea-like high canopy beds draped in milky chiffon drapery alongside teak furniture, brightened up by handwoven rugs from a local co-operative and tropical artworks. The master bedroom is the size of most London apartments. Or go for a bedroom leading to the shady veranda, lined with planter's chairs and cooled by the mountain breezes. There's also a separate family annexe with a whopping playroom.

PHOTOGRAPHS: MO ARPI

Double-height sitting room, Braganza House; Opposite page: **Claughton House entrance;** Previous pages: **aerial view of Maliga Kanda**

Balcony off the master bedroom at Maliga Kanda

“There’s a villa to suit everyone—be it a petite family hideaway amid a verdant rice paddy, an all-out contemporary party pad in the hills, or a jaw-dropping beach retreat”

PHOTOGRAPH: MO ARPI

Voluptuous white sofas and coffee table books fill the living room but you won’t stay in for long. Reason? That saltwater infinity pool. Surrounded by pots of bright white bougainvillea, poolside lunches stretch late into the afternoon—Chef Shaluka’s Ottolenghi-style food (ask for the beetroot and feta salad) is a cut above. Walk it off with a wander to the paddy fields or a workout in the gym. There’s also a spa in the garden cottage plus a lovely terrace for yoga. Happiness is Maurien’s goal for guests and, here, it’s hard not to find. *From ₹74,129 per night. maligakanda.com*

KUMBURA

BEST FOR: BEING COSY IN NATURE

Housekeeper Manjula is quite possibly the most genuinely smiley person on the planet. And that’s the thing about this cosseting four-bedroom villa near Galle. It’s happy-making. Well-thought-out, cosy, and playful, it has a make-yourself-at-home ease—and children will fall head over heels for the villa dog, Bruno.

Camouflaged away, down a tea plantation-lined drive, this little oasis with white-washed columns was dreamed up a couple of years ago by avid travellers Cecile and her husband, Simon. The couple wanted a well-rounded education for their three young children: Louis, Marie, and Camille. A villa on the beach was out of reach so they bought a plot inland, hired a local architect and spent two years pouring lots of love into their vision. And it was a family effort—Camille advised on the bedrooms, Marie chose the crockery, and Louis, a competitive swimmer, focused on the show-stopping infinity pool, in the centre of the villa, overlooking paddy fields (you’re given a bag of rice to take home with you).

There are four en-suite bedrooms, including a lovely garden suite, which feature super comfortable canopy beds, bold graphic prints, planter’s chairs, plus, polished cement bathrooms. The walls are dotted with wildlife photographs. Bunches of bananas hang from the trees over the open-air dining table, where Manjula delivers delicious local rice and curry to the sounds of the local temple. While it’s easy just to languish beside the pool (where you can spot buffalos, monkeys, and peacocks), take the troops to the cool The Shack Beach Café, a short *tuk-tuk* ride away, for surfing and kid-friendly food. There is also Rupert Beeley’s fascinating tour of his cinnamon plantation at Top House Weligama that all ages can enjoy. *From ₹30,043 per night. kumburaluxuryvilla.com*

SKYE HOUSE

BEST FOR: AN ALL-OUT FAMILY BEACH ESCAPE

Families scramble to book this hot ticket of a villa and that’s not surprising. It’s got a lot going for it—a playground with a pirate hut, Italian cuisine by Chef Sam and smack-bang-on-the-beach location. Plus, it is now fresher than ever—after a two-year revamp by British interior designer Jo Eden. The five bedrooms, with original teak furniture and French windows, are now a riot of colour. Ask for the Pink Room, ablaze with fuchsia Indian block print and a pink-painted bathroom. Go to sleep to the sounds of the ocean and wake up to the sea view before wandering out through the French windows onto the wraparound balcony with a cup of Ceylon tea.

Every generation will love it here. There’s the pool suite, separate from the main house, with its super king-size bed and subterranean bathroom, plus, the infinity pool on the doorstep. Children can talk all night in their (very cool) room with three sets of bunk beds and an overflowing amount of games. There’s a snooker table on the landing for more grown-up fun.

> “The thing about Kumbura, a cosseting villa near Galle, is that it makes you happy. Well-thought-out, cosy, and playful, it has a make-yourself-at-home ease”

The breezy open-plan sitting and dining room features sink-right-into-it sofas and armchairs aplenty, with local handwoven deep royal and azure blue textiles, upping the beachside feel. Natural light floods the space, further cooled by the white walls and painted vaulted ceilings. Children can cartwheel, let off steam, and dodge the sun beds dotting the palm-fringed lawn, which leads directly onto Habaraduwa beach—one of the best beaches on the south coast. The sugary soft sand stretches for miles, where you can boogie board, swim, have hours of fun and finish with a BBQ on the beach. You might even spot nesting sea turtles during a full moon. *From ₹68,099 per night. skyehousesrilanka.com*

LUNUGANGA

BEST FOR: KEEPING HISTORY BUFFS HAPPY

It’s hard to rival the fascinating story of this terracotta-tile roofed villa, tucked away on legendary architect Geoffrey Bawa’s estate, Lunuganga, just inland from the beach town of Bentota. This one-of-a-kind house was designed by Bawa in 1962 for flamboyant batik designer Ena de Silva in Colombo. However, when Ena decided to sell up in 2009, the Lunuganga Trust came on board and dismantled brick by brick the house before rebuilding it at Lunuganga, 55 miles away down the coast. The project was finally completed in 2016. Five years later, when Teardrop Hotels took over management of Lunuganga, the house joined the party and opened its doors for rent in April 2021.

Hidden among cinnamon, mango, and tamarind trees, two whopping granite millstones flank the entrance before you head through a huge bell-covered temple door into the magnificent central courtyard with a giant matured tree. Keep exploring, past Ena’s colourful batik work of dragonflies, crocodiles, and monkeys, and you will happen upon satin wood columns, delicate louvred panels bathing the rooms in sunlight, and unexpected courtyards.

The three sweeping bedrooms are filled with antiques, and deeply patterned embroidered cushions and bedspreads. Bag Ena’s batik-lined bedroom with its king-size platform bed and bathroom with blue and white pottery bowls embedded in the walls. While excellent feasts can be served in the expansive dining room—jump on the waiting *tuk-tuk* which will whizz you through the jungle to Lunuganga itself, where you can tuck into the tastiest rice and curry. It’s a destination here—and a perfect jumping off point on your way from Colombo to Galle—where you can fill your days discovering the magical gardens, and splash around in the estate’s spanking new swimming pool. *From ₹74,454 per night. teardrop-hotels.com*

CLAUGHTON HOUSE

BEST FOR: A BLOW-OUT HOUSE PARTY

There’s something hypnotic about this Bawa-designed villa on Sri Lanka’s southern shores. Overlooking the picturesque surf of Kudawella Bay, close to the town of Dikwella, its grand gates give away that this five-bedroom white-washed villa is quite something. Named after the original owner’s ancestral Lancashire seat, the place is fittingly grand—a phenomenal pavilion-like structure, with towering teak blue columns, among a highland of palm trees.

It’s the glistening pool, balancing above the sea at the end of the highland, which is the real attraction. Carved into the cliff, with exposed rock, while away the hours lolling here—with the speedy staff whizzing you drinks throughout the day. Or wander down a jungle path through a Narnia-esque door and onto the beach, which is ideal for romantic strolls, early morning runs, and fantastic seasonal surfing. In the evening, ask for a poolside BBQ where Ajit (one of the best chefs on the south coast) will cook up a lusty feast piled high with mahi-mahi kebabs, using banana blossoms from his own garden. You’ll barely go near your room—which comes with a little garden and outdoor shower—but when you do, you’ll bask in the elegance and calm of it. Children will love the twin room, which comes complete with a tennis table. And if you’re not quite ready for bed, the open side terrace, with sofas, bean bags, and cubby holes, is perfect for late-night chats.

When you’re in the mood to explore, a short *tuk-tuk* ride away is the horseshoe bay of Hiriketiya (idyllic but go in the morning before the surfers roll in) or treat yourself to lunch at uber chic Amanwella, just around the corner. *From ₹91,227 per night. claughtonhouse.com*

ARMITAGE HILL

BEST FOR: SERIOUS WOW FACTOR

The late Australian Kerry Hill set the architecture world alight with his progressive designs for Aman hotels. But only the clued-up know about his stunning home—a 19th-century plantation house on a former rubber estate near Galle. Hill spent 30 years developing the 21-acre space into a serene masterpiece of modern design. He used the house not only as a home but as a testing ground for Aman design concepts and furniture prototypes. The architect worked his magic on the property, raising the roof, adding pavilions, courtyards and ponds—everything a mesmerising shimmer of titanium and cement.

After Hill and his wife, Ruth, died in 2018, their sons, Jeremy and Andrew, decided to rent out the villa for the first time. They left the house pretty much as it was—still filled with old Dutch chests, antique animal statues from Jaffna, large bronze urli bowls (now lily ponds), black glazed pots from India, and a couple of Catholic pieces from the Portuguese era. There are five bedrooms—each a work of art, thanks to Hill’s exacting touch. Stay in the architect’s own (super sleek) bedroom and studio (the ‘Black Pavilion’), and admire the wooden temple friezes decorating the walls.

The main house veranda is the place to sit—where peacocks strut past to the sound of the Muslim call to prayer from the village to the west, mingled with the chanting from the nearby Buddhist temple. Or float in the glorious glass-flat pool, which overlooks the Gin River meandering its way to the coast. For something more active, hop aboard a tuk-tuk and go shopping with Chef Duminda in Galle’s fish market (amazing). Then return and let him cook up a feast—his flambé banana is the stuff of legend. Plus, breakfasts don’t get much better than this—a never-ending run of string hoppers, curries, the works. A very special place which will leave you awestruck. *From ₹53,157 per night. armitage_hill*

PHOTOGRAPH: HANNAH WOOD

A bedroom in Kumbura Villa

79 LEYN BAAN STREET

BEST FOR: HAVING THE COOLEST ADDRESS IN TOWN

After being the general manager of hot hotel Heckfield Place following a 20-year stint with the Aman, Olivia Richli is fully wised up on what you need. And that's all brilliantly evident at her 18th-century Dutch merchant's house with its prime position on Leyn Baan Street in the heart of Galle Fort. It's all wonderfully turquoise as soon as you step through the Dutch antique doors with its original stained glass, the Moroccan floor tiles, retro chairs, the lampshades, and the staircase. An ornamental pool, filled with silvery fish, is in the centre of the villa, surrounded by sparkly Indonesian textiles, Sri Lankan timber stag heads, tribal artwork and brass tinder boxes—all collected during Olivia's various junkets around the world. There are shelves crammed with well-thumbed classics, a cupboard brimming with board games and family wedding photos—making it feel all reassuringly lived in.

There are three low-key eclectic bedrooms—choose the sleigh bed in the rooftop room with its en-suite sunken bathtub. It's also closest to the shaded courtyard below, where charming housekeeper Kanthi rolls out a delicious fruit-filled breakfast on a long polished cement table. When you can tear yourself away, venture out onto the cobbled streets and stumble upon superb eateries (book a table at the Fort Printers), hawking shopkeepers and cool boutiques (visit Barefoot on Pedlar Street). Just be back in time to watch the sun set over the sea from the fabulous blue-stoned roof terrace. For a hideaway in the hills, check out Idle House, also owned by Richli with her husband, Alex, which is equally gorgeous to rent. *From ₹24,819 per night. 79leynbaanstreet.com*

BRAGANZA HOUSE

BEST FOR: LIVING OUT YOUR INTERIOR DESIGN DREAMS

British designer Chloe Elkerton built this ridiculously pretty villa from scratch. Set among jackfruit, king coconut, and papaya trees, just inland from Thalpe beach on the south coast, it's an imaginative new take on a traditional Sri Lankan bungalow. Gone is the teak furniture and the white-washed look. Instead, this new kid on the block is a carefully curated bohemian-chic collage of Greece, Morocco, and Bali inspirations, whipped up in a fresh palette of corals, pinks, and greens. All the big interior names are here, too—Colefax, Nicky Haslam, and Fermoie, irresistibly combined with locally handmade furniture and Dutch antiques.

A show-stopping Moroccan-inspired courtyard leads to the four individually designed suites, each with its own spacious terrace. Choose the Palm Suite with its shell grotto to ponder life in. But it's the light-filled living space, with hanging rattan lanterns, which is the real wow with Buddhist temple fans mixed with Indian inlaid chairs, handwoven Ghanaian baskets, and confident seascapes. French windows lead out onto the lush lawn, which slopes down to a curvy white terrazzo swimming pool, surrounded by palms. Later on, settle down in the shady poolside pagoda, with countryside views, for a cocktail before tucking into just-caught juicy jumbo prawns, complemented by an array of colourful salads.

When you are up for an adventure, hotfoot it to Turtle Beach, where you can, indeed, swim in crystal clear waters in the company of benign giant turtles, who hang about in the water, completely unperturbed. Buzzy Galle Fort is also a 20-minute tuk-tuk ride away. *From ₹62,046 per night. braganza-house.com*

"At Skye House, there's the pool suite, separate from the main house, with its super king-size bed and subterranean bathroom, plus, the infinity pool on the doorstep"

The pool at Skye House

PHOTOGRAPH: **MO ARPI**

CNT's Divia Thani, designer Gaurav Gupta, and EQ Hotels' Imshan Jamal

RAISE A TOAST TO STYLE

After master couturier Gaurav Gupta made his debut at the Paris Haute Couture Week earlier this year, the natural order of business was to celebrate the moment in style. It was a full house at the all-new Hôtel Dame des Arts in St. Germain, Paris, with global fashion icons joining *Condé Nast Traveler's* Global Editorial Director Divia Thani and Imshan Jamal, co-founder of EQ Hotels to laud the man of the hour. Vodka martinis flowed until late and kept spirits high along with DJ Jez Pereira's superb mixes while Chef Othoniel Alvarez Castaneda sustained energy levels with his delectable Mexican hors d'oeuvres.

Mitali Sagar Patel and Summiyya Patni Shah

Ilya Vanzato

Raphaël Say

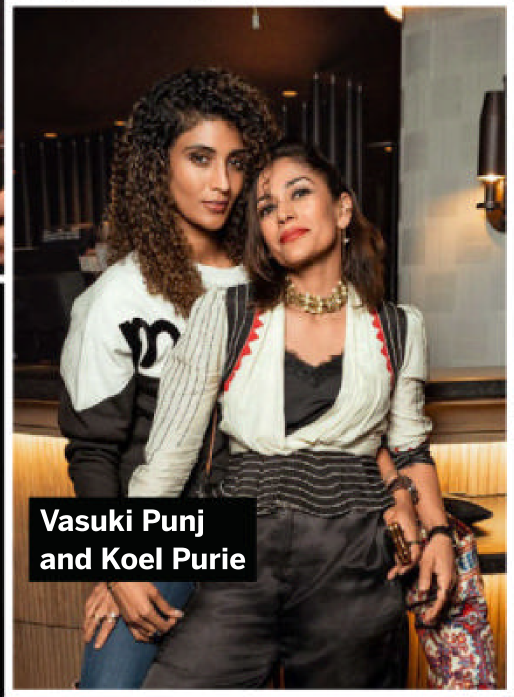
Constantin Le Blan

Rosemin Manji

Jean-François Soler, Sandeep Gill, and Olivier Houlez

DJ Jez Pereira

Hoang Doan



Vasuki Punj and Koel Purie

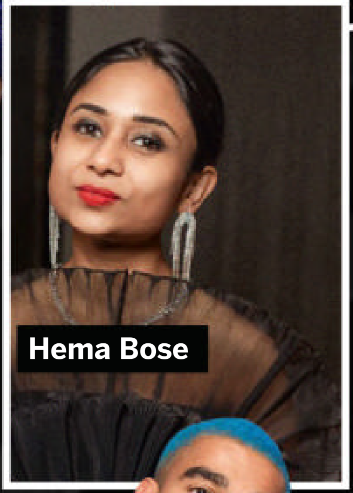
Navkirat Sodhi

Sanket Mehta

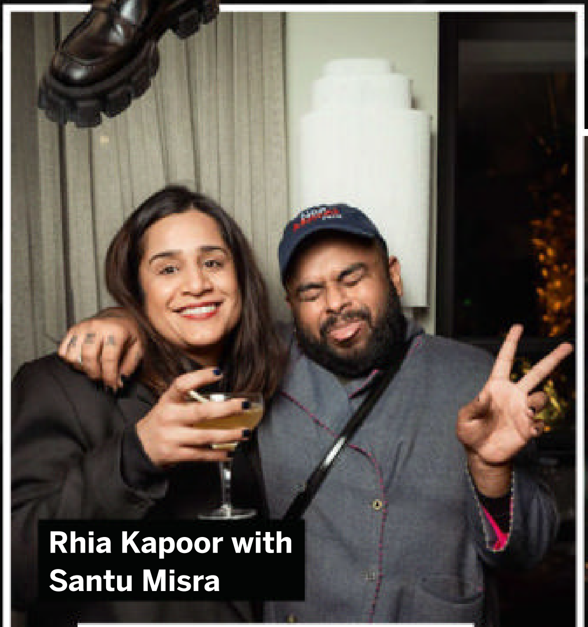
Andy Wong and Sheetal Mafatlal

Ritika Bhasin Gupta

Laura Burman



Hema Bose



Rhia Kapoor with Santu Misra

Harikrishnan S, Pankhuri Harikrishnan, and Zeenah Vilcassim

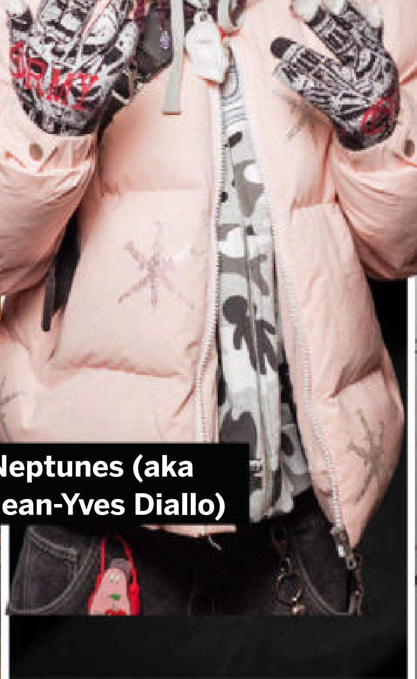
Gato

Anjali Doshi

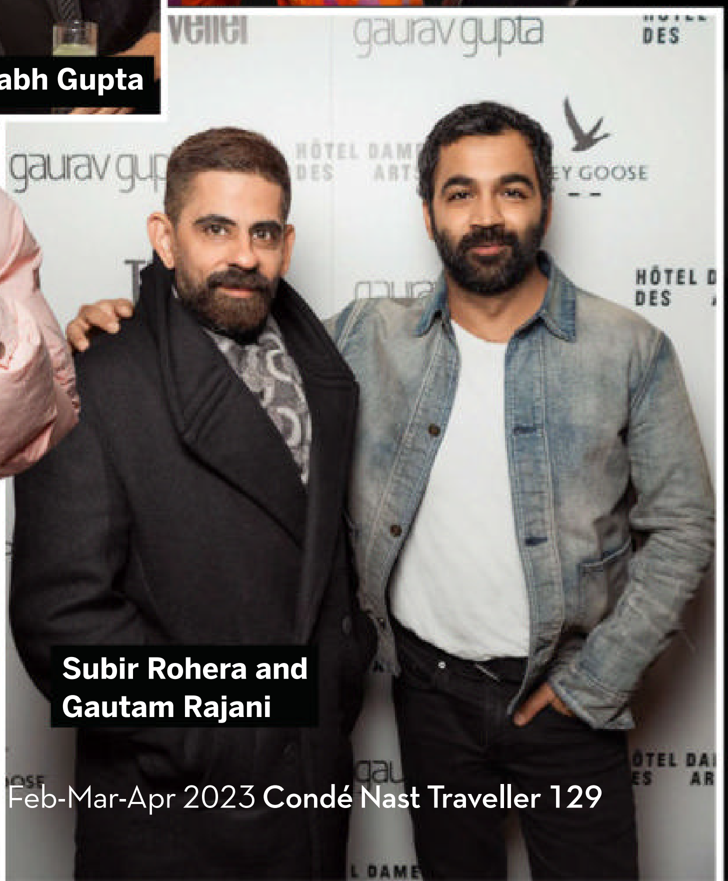
Lavina Baldota

Saurabh Gupta

Hôtel Dame des Arts facade



Neptunes (aka Jean-Yves Diallo)



Subir Rohera and Gautam Rajani

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOMY DO; LUDOVIC BALEY; KATE DEVINE

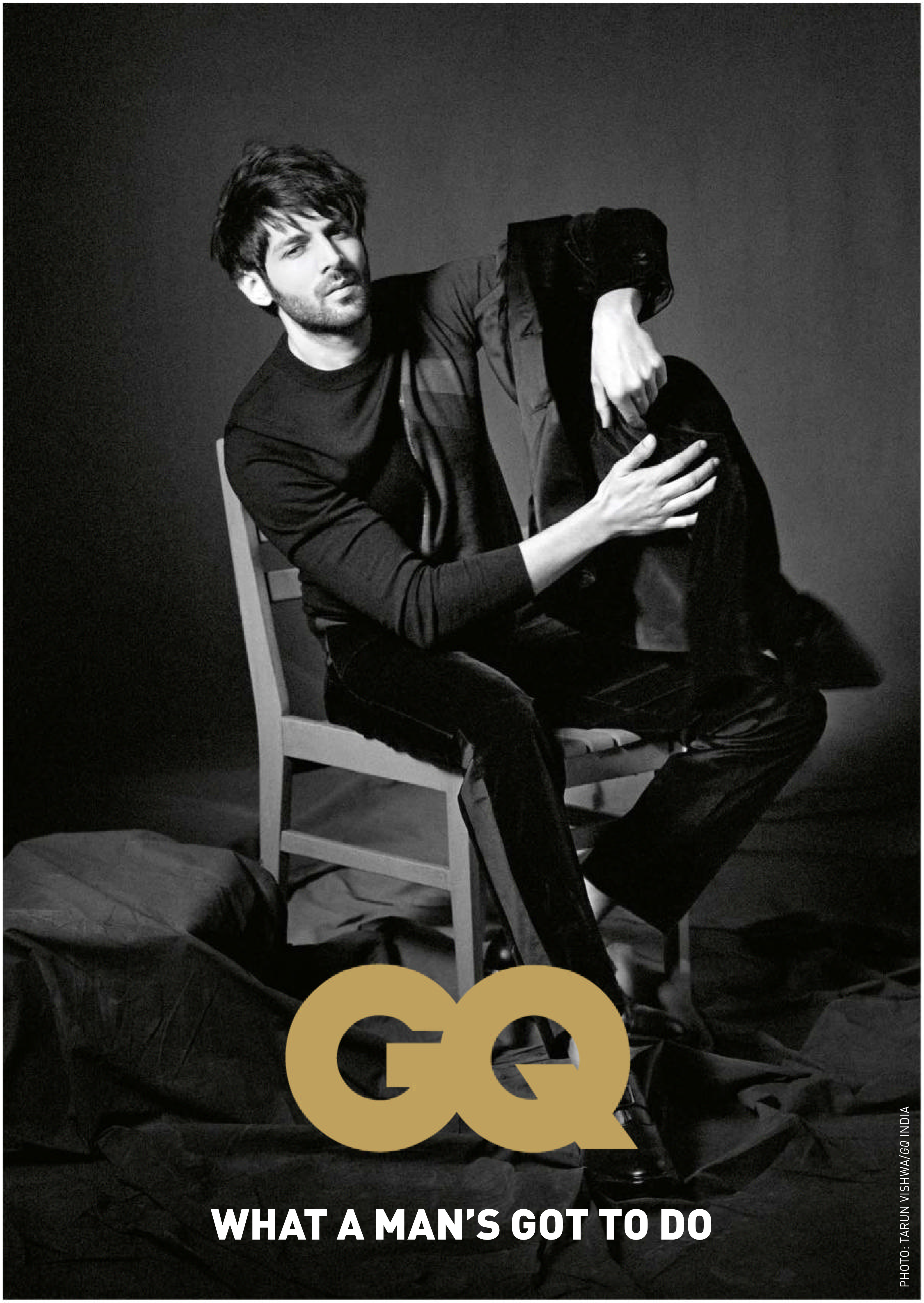

GQ
WHAT A MAN'S GOT TO DO

PHOTO: TARUN VISHWA/*GQ* INDIA

STARRY NIGHT

It was an evening of conversations with the brightest minds of our time on the lawns of an 18th-century palace illuminated with hundreds of diyas. The annual bash thrown by Penguin Random House India is the most awaited party of the Jaipur Literature Festival and this year's edition held at the Rajmahal Palace RAAS Jaipur was a gathering of literary heavyweights and on point with its elegance and style. The turnout included Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah, Booker winners Shehan Karunatilaka, Geetanjali Shree and Daisy Rockwell, Pulitzer awardee Siddhartha Mukherjee, philanthropist and author Sudha Murty, JLF founder and co-director William Dalrymple, along with the world's leading names in the publishing business. The cold winter night was warmed by wine and gin and whisky cocktails and an inspired spread including junglee maas, rosemary lamb chops, stir-fried tofu and more.

Myntra founder and author Mukesh Bansal with his team

Aalok Shrivastav, Vaishali Mathur, Vishal Mathur and Sanjay Giri

CNT's Diya Kohli

Shehan Karunatilaka

Rebecca Wragg Sykes, Tom Holland, Simon Sebag Montefiore and Katy Hessel

Nishtha Gautam

Singer Ila Arun (right) with her sisters

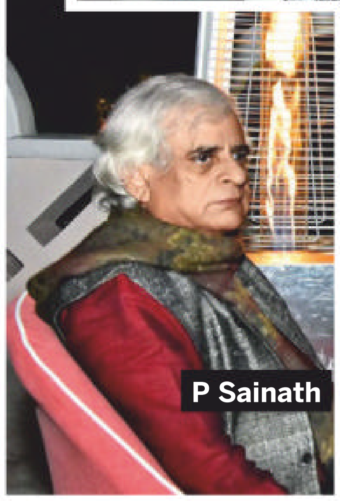
Rick Simonson and Ruth Ozeki

Shobhaa De

Varud Gupta, Ayushi Rastogi, Sandeep Jaggi and Gurveen Chadha of Penguin Random House

Sudha Murty

Bulbul Sharma


P Sainath

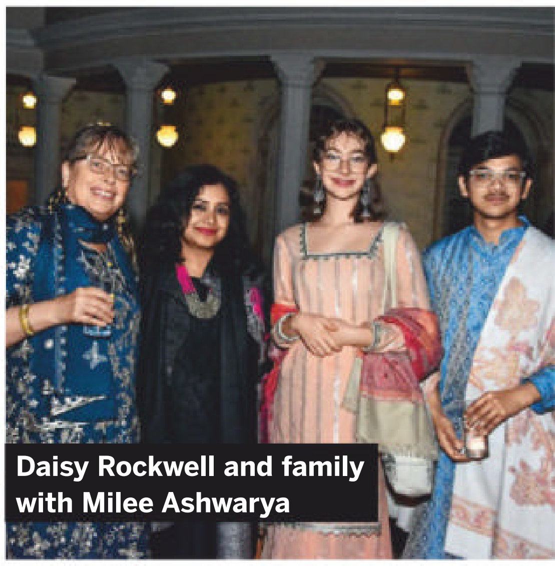
Prajwal Parajuly and Bee Rowlatt

Suraj Yengde, Milee Ashwarya of Penguin Random House, Yogesh Maitreya and Meena Kandasamy

Shalini Sharma

Rajmahal Palace RAAS Jaipur

Ahlawat Gunjan


Daisy Rockwell and family with Milee Ashwarya

On The Go

Our pick of the most stylish finds and travel-related news

RAISE A TOAST TO LOVE

Imagine saying "I do" under a resplendent *mandap*, surrounded by the natural beauty of the serene mountains or perhaps a grand celebration on a picturesque beachfront to honour your fabled forever. With a range of properties across the country, Hyatt understands the significance of originality and offers personalised experiences, from the perfect proposal package to a sustainable aisle walk. Indulge in the romance and luxury of a Hyatt wedding, where every detail is perfectly tailored to suit your moodboard. At Hyatt Hotels, "Perfectly Yours" is more than just a phrase—it's a promise.

For more information, visit www.hyatt.com

DISCOVER HOLISTIC WELLNESS

It's easy to lose sight of yourself amid the daily routine, and incorporating "me-time" into a hectic schedule can be a challenge. This is where Amal Tamara enters the picture. The Amal Tamara team has introduced a new experience, The Vachana Programme, designed to help you make meaningful and sustainable changes towards a healthier and happier self. With its personalised Ayurveda treatments, curated diet, and daily guided yoga and meditation sessions, this immersive experience will jump-start your Ayurvedic Journey for Life.

For more information, visit www.amaltamara.com

SUSTAINABLE INDULGENCE

Gone are the days when eco-friendly travel meant foregoing comfort and luxury. ITC Narmada is a luxurious oasis in the heart of Ahmedabad that flawlessly blends sustainability and culture. The LEED-certified property has rooms and suites in addition to a delightful array of eco-friendly amenities. The hotel's magnificent design is inspired by monuments such as the Adalaj stepwell and the Vadnagar toran. With a range of dining options and a refreshing spa, guests can enjoy all the facilities of a luxury hotel while supporting responsible travel.

For more information, visit www.itchotels.com/in/en/itcnarmada-ahmedabad

ITC NARMADA

MURAL MASTERPIECES

Looking to set off on an audacious excursion steeped in opulence? Consider Samode Safari Lodge—where the bonfires are roaring, food is sumptuous, and adventure opportunities are unrivalled. Designed to mirror the wilderness surrounding the property, the lodge's Gond Murals are the focal point in each of the 12 private villas. The idea comes to life with famous Gond artists Venkat Singh Shyam and Dileep on board, featuring tigers, monkeys, deers, peacocks, and a variety of exotic birds, each drawn and picked with great care to complement the theme of the room. Luxuriate in the plush tub and be enchanted by the beautiful intricacies of these breathtaking murals.

For more information, visit www.samode.com

On The Go

CELEBRATE TOGETHERNESS

If you're looking for a staycation in the heart of the hills, Hyatt Regency Dehradun's first anniversary celebrations and the exciting offers will immerse you in a world of luxury experiences. From receiving the signature Pahadi Topi welcome to a whole range of activities, expect a special discount on all services, including spa treatments, food and beverages, and laundry. Indulge in a breakfast buffet at Range or unwind at the Malt Bar with one plus one on selected beverages. Families get a complimentary stay and dine for up to two children under 12, as well as free access to Camp Hyatt. Finally, take home a Departure Gift as a memento of your unforgettable stay.

For more information, visit www.hyatt.com

TIMELESS APPEAL OF ART

Art enthusiasts were treated to a visual feast at DAG's new gallery at Janpath at a private event celebrating the opening of the second edition of the prestigious annual exhibition, Iconic Masterpieces of Indian Modern Art, Edition 2. The exhibition featured thirty rare and historic works from renowned artists. Each composition is a testament to the enduring legacy of Indian art and its ability to transcend time and culture, captivating audiences across generations.

For more information, visit www.dagworld.com

FORM IV
(See Rule 8 of The Registration Of Newspapers (Central) Rules, 1956)

Statement about ownership and other particulars about newspaper Conde Nast Traveller (English) as required to be published in the first issue every year after the last day of February.

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I, Pankaj Singh Parihar, hereby declare that the particulars given above a true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/-

Signature of Publisher

Date: March 1, 2023

VOGUE INDIA
NOV 2019
ANUSHKA SHARMA
WOMEN of the YEAR 2019
(and the men we love)

VOGUE INDIA
OCT 2018
WELCOME TO THE AGE OF BLURRED LINES
11th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL
STARRING RANVEER SINGH & SARA SAMPAIO

VOGUE INDIA
AUG 2019
THE VOGUE WATCH REPORT 2019
Timepieces to binge on
WHAT'S YOUR BEAUTY CARBON FOOTPRINT?
It's time to find out
DEEPIKA PADUKONE
UNFILTERED

VOGUE INDIA

BEFORE IT'S IN FASHION, IT'S IN VOGUE!

VOGUE INDIA
SEPT 2019
The September Issue
GUEST EDITED BY SABYASACHI
STARRING PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS

VOGUE INDIA
APR 2018
SKINCARE
Everything you didn't know
SRIDEVI: A VOGUE TRIBUTE
20 RULES for the summer bride
GREATEST HITS
Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Pharrell Williams and the art of playing it cool

VOGUE INDIA
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YOU CAN HANG WITH US
KYLIE JENNER
KARLIE KLOSS
SHWETA BACHCHAN NANDA
68 FASHIONABLE FINDS THAT WON'T BREAK THE BANK
THE MILLENNIAL SPECIAL
ADITI RAO HYDARI*
* we'll have what she's having

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, **Nepal**

The story of Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, opened in 1998 by Sir Edmund Hillary, begins with a love for the mountains. This extends from its efforts in regenerative tourism to its location and design that showcase the majestic Annapurna Range. Its entryway frames Mt. Machhapuchhre and no matter where you are—having coffee in your balcony, walking in the terraced fruit gardens, or enjoying a hearty Nepali meal in the dining area—all you see are glorious snow-capped peaks. The cottages are made with hand-cut stone, and furnished with rich Tibetan rugs and local art. The main lodge, with its fireplace and an expansive library with books on mountaineering, is a place for fellow travellers to mingle, sip a drink, or simply soak in the views. **ARUNDHATI AIL** ***(tigermountainpokhara.com; doubles from ₹53,800)***

Condé Nast Traveller
THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL

PHOTO: ATHUL PRASAD/CONDÉ NAST *TRAVELLER* INDIA

Condé Nast Traveller
THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL

PHOTO: ERRIKOS ANDREOU/*CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER* INDIA